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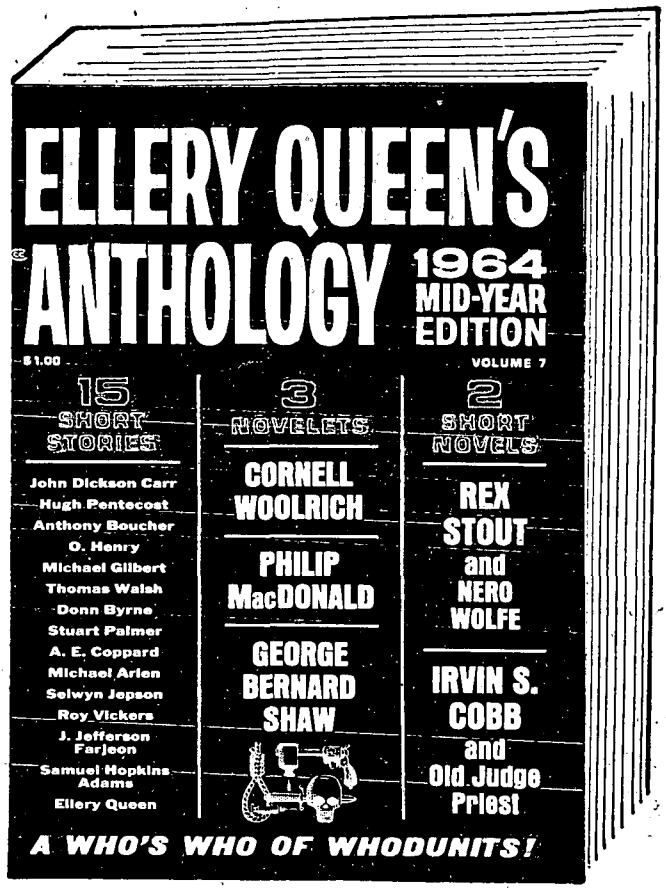

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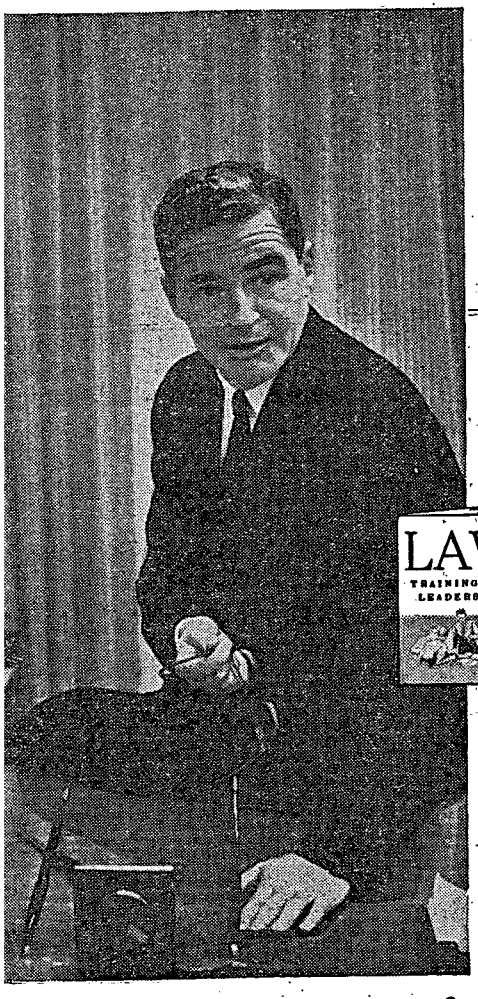

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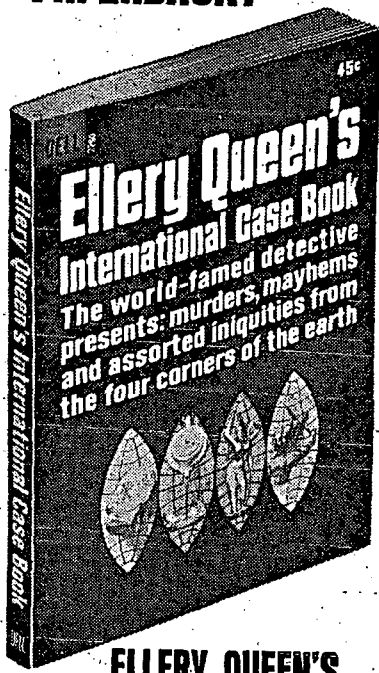
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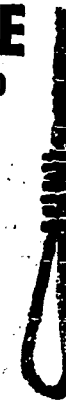

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DETECTION, CRIME, and . . .

THE NEEDLE SHARP AS EVER — *Hugh Pentecost* — 6

SUSU AND THE 8:30 GHOST — *Lilian Jackson Braun* — 35

THE SAILING CLUB — *David Ely* — 44

ROUTINE INVESTIGATION — *Robert Twohy* — 54

STEPS . . . COMING NEAR — *William Irish* — 60

FEDERAL OFFENSE — *Henry Slesar* — 65

THE COBBLESTONES OF SARATOGA STREET — *Avram Davidson* — 67

DIME STORE DIAMOND — *Arthur Moore* — 94

TWENTY-FOUR PETITS FOURS — *M. F. K. Fisher* — 99

THE PHOTOGRAPHER AND THE POLICEMAN — *James Holding* — 106

THE DETECTIVE IN THE IRON LUNG — *Vern Gaudel* — 126

EQMM "FIRST STORY"

THERE IS NO DREAMING — *Kyle Montgomery* — 118

HARDCOVERS AND PAPERBACKS OF THE MONTH — 59

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH — *Anthony Boucher* — 105

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***a NEW story by* HUGH PENTECOST**

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THE NEEDLE SHARP AS EVER

by HUGH PENTECOST

IT HAD BEEN SAID OF SEBASTIAN Salazar, known as Sibby to his intimates, that he lived by the needle. The word needle, in this instance, had the verb-meaning—"to needle." Sibby Salazar's needle was, in fact, a venom-dipped tongue, used to inflame hidden wounds, to reveal dangerous secrets, to publicize private weaknesses, to inflate small disagreements into climax quarrels. The chief miracle of Sibby Salazar's life, someone once remarked, was that he had managed to live to the age of 55 without being clobbered, or even murdered, by someone whose life he'd destroyed just "for fun."

People who were not the victims of Sibby Salazar's poisonous technique found him extremely amusing. He could tear to pieces a novel or a painting or a play or a public figure—like an actress or a politician—with a biting, oblique wit that was often shatteringly funny. He was a marvelous mimic, and the acid of his words was underlined by grotesque inflections and mannered imitations.

Sibby was handsome in a weak-mouthed way. At 55 his childish petulance was somehow amusing and winning, until the dark eyes narrowed and the needle was aimed directly at your insides—or at your heart. There was nothing amusing or winning about what happened then, except perhaps to a bystander whose sadism matched Sibby's.

Luxury was an essential to living as far as Sibby Salazar was concerned. He liked silk against his skin. His underwear was silk and he carried his own silk sheets with him whenever he spent a week-end somewhere. His taste in foods and drink was exotic and expensive. His clothes were bright-colored, his maroon dinner jacket a sort of

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trademark. He wore an opera cloak lined with white satin when he went out in the evening. He had, he often remarked, "an allergy for the ordinary."

His closest friends were women—young, rich women who were not altogether satisfied with their lives, their marriages, their romances. Sibby was the perfect escort because no man could, even for a moment, be seriously jealous of him. He was the perfect confidant. And in the end he usually managed to turn discontent into chaos.

Genuinely happy people couldn't be bothered with Sibby because they had no need of him. Unhappy women found him amusing, sympathetic, and helpful, never realizing that he was actually a kind of sinister Peeping Tom greasing the runway to disaster for the sheer delight of witnessing the crackup. It was a sort of vindictive lifework with Sibby. No one must be allowed the kind of happiness which, psychologically and temperamentally, he couldn't enjoy himself.

Sibby chose all his victims with an almost uncanny mediumistic ability to foresee the future—to foresee the tragic ending. The highway along which he had traveled his 55 years was marked by a number of suicides, near suicides, and an almost endless number of bloody fights. Violence, however, was only incidental to the wreckage of marriages, love affairs, businesses, and careers.

Sibby had never toyed with murder itself. But at 55 he was beginning to feel jaded, and he found himself in a situation which, if properly handled, could lead to that ultimate in sensation. He could, he foresaw, mastermind a killing, and with luck be a spectator to the actual deed. The fermenting ingredients of real violence were at hand. What Sibby's internal crystal ball did not reveal to him was that, for once, he was being outmatched in evil, and that he was not, as he imagined, in full control of the "game."

What Sibby Salazar privately called "my woman's intuition" was not working on all cylinders that hot August morning. He had no premonition of calamity for himself, although he had an electric feeling that this could well be the day of climax in the lives of Consuela and George Conrad. It was a deliciously electric feeling, accompanied by something to which he wasn't accustomed—a slight sensation of regret. It was altogether possible that something remotely like genuine affection for Consuela was what dulled Sibby's perceptions.

He had never felt anything but contempt and distaste for the others; but he would miss Consuela. He had even considered the possibility of dropping the whole plan, but he knew he would never again be faced with so promising a situation. There was only one George Conrad, dark, brooding, violent, merciless. Poor,

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dear Consuela. She was, of course, asking for it. A few judicious proddings by Sibby, and George Conrad would explode like a hand grenade.

Yes, poor, dear Consuela . . .

However, Sibby thought, stretching his naked body sensuously on the silken sheets he'd brought with him to the Conrad country house, there would be the compensation of George's death. Because George would die too, after a shaken and horrified Sibby gave his eyewitness account to the police. George's death was the real bull's-eye in the target—George, whom Sibby had overheard asking Consuela how long "is that crashing bore of a Sibby to be a member of the family?"

"Dear, dear Sibby," Consuela had sighed a few days before when they had lunched together at the Colony. "Without your help I shall go out of my mind."

Sibby's luncheon consisted of a split of champagne and thinly sliced caviar sandwiches. He watched Consuela from under his heavy-lidded eyes, a faintly ironic smile moving the corners of his mouth. She was so very beautiful and so very helpless, he thought. She differed in one major respect from Sibby's usual women friends. Consuela had not been a rich heiress rushed off her feet by a fortune hunter. Consuela had been lovely but penniless when she married George Conrad. Her determined mother had quietly died of relief shortly after the marriage—after Consuela had achieved her mother's optimum hopes by making an alliance with the Conrad millions. Happiness and money had been synonymous in mama's credo. The handsome, brooding George had been the catch of a generation, and for such a catch Consuela could be expected to put up with black tempers and sadistic outbursts of rage. Mama had been certain of that before she died.

But Consuela, Sibby realized, was not bearing up.

"It is two years now, Sibby dear," Consuela said, "and I must find a way out."

"You have found a way, if the current rumors are reliable," Sibby said.

"Rumors?" Her blue eyes, bright as diamonds, seemed to mirror an inner terror.

"Greg Foster," Sibby said. "Charming, but without any financial resources, my dear."

"Who cares for money!" Consuela exclaimed lightly.

Sibby's laughter was a rippling dissonance. His eyes moved over the sable jacket, the diamond earrings, the fabulous engagement and wedding ring combination on her left hand. He thought about the mansion on Fifth Avenue, the country estate in the Berkshires, the whole island in the West Indies, the Rolls Royce, the Mercedes, the Ferrari, the half dozen lesser cars, the horses, the power boats, the corps of servants in each establishment, the bottomless charge ac-

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counts with the most famous couturiers in the world. A few concealed bruises on that lovely body were not too much to bear, he thought. George Conrad paid a handsome price for his intimate privileges.

"You said 'rumors'." Consuela leaned forward.

"I'd be cautious about extra-curricular activities." Sibby took a small bite of a caviar sandwich. "There is so much for you to lose, my pet."

"I'm in love," Consuela said. Her eyes were so bright they dazzled him.

Sibby shrugged. "Divorce—and a one-room apartment on the West Side," he said, conjuring up the worst nightmare he could think of.

"George won't agree to a divorce," she said. "I'm a piece of property he bought and owns. He won't give me up."

"So you have an affair with Greg and you laugh at him," Sibby said. "It would seem, my sweet, that you can have your cake and eat it."

A little shudder moved Consuela's seductive body inside her clothes. "You don't know George," she said. "He would find a way to kill me if he discovered I was having an affair. And he *would* discover it, Sibby. I'm watched everywhere I go. At this very moment he knows I'm lunching with you."

"Should I be frightened?" Sibby asked drily.

"Of course not, Sibby dear. He knows I'm perfectly safe with you."

"Does he indeed?" Sibby said, his eyes narrowing.

"The thing with Greg began at the Davenports," Consuela explained. "We went there for a week-end. George was called back unexpectedly to New York on business. I had a few hours with Greg. We weren't watched because George had planned to do his own watching. In—in those few hours, Sibby, I learned that Greg was all I wanted in the world."

"And George doesn't suspect?"

"Not yet. I'm sure—not yet."

"And how," Sibby asked, "am I supposed to help?"

"This week-end," Consuela said. She was breathing hard. "I must have a chance to be with Greg alone. If you will come to the Berkshires with us—"

"How will that help?"

"Now don't be angry, Sibby. George despises you, but he will not object to my asking you. He will not object to my spending time with you while he works on his precious horses. He has a new jumper that he'll be schooling. Greg will be staying at an Inn near town. While George thinks you and I are driving about the countryside, I will be with Greg. Please, Sibby! It's the only way Greg and I can solve our problem."

He looked at her, wondering. Suppose he demanded a special price? Suppose he insisted on playing the role of lover himself so that he could laugh at George Conrad for

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the rest of his life? He abandoned that thought because it was then, like a gentle mist drifting in from the sea, he became aware that the greatest of all sensations might be his. A word to George Conrad—the guilty lovers discovered—Sibby a spectator—and death to both these people who treated him so contemptuously. A faint prickle of excitement seemed to run over the whole skin of his body.

"I'll help you, my sweet. Of course I'll help you," he said.

And now, Sibby thought, moving lazily between his silk sheets, the time was close at hand. Today—or tomorrow at the latest.

George Conrad was darkly handsome. He came to breakfast that morning—that hot August morning—in white twill riding breeches and black boots, his silver spurs clanking as he walked. He wore a white polo shirt with a knotted scarf at his throat—the scarf as scarlet as blood.

"What are you two planning for the day?" he asked, his black eyes insolently on Sibby who was at the sideboard helping himself to creamed finnan haddie which he put on half a golden toasted English muffin.

Consuela sat at the head of the long, oak dining-room table, playing with a glass of juice and some thinly sliced gluten toast. She was almost glittering with excitement. The little fool, Sibby thought. Can't she control herself? Surely she'll give herself away.

"I thought of driving Sibby up into the hills—Vermont way," she said, fighting for casualness. "An all-day picnic."

George Conrad nodded. He cut into a thin, rare steak with a knife as sharp as a razor blade. Sibby shuddered. Steak for breakfast! "The things that please you grow more and more mysterious, Consuela," George said drily. "But before you go—"

Consuela's hand froze on its way toward her coffee cup. A flash of fear made her look—for just an instant—almost ugly.

George laughed. "Just a whim of mine, Connie dear," George said. "I'd like you to see the new jumper I bought from Rawlinson. He's a wonderful and terrible animal. He reminds me, in a way, of you, Consuela. Today I am going to teach him that I must have my way. I'd like you and Sibby to watch—if Sibby can bear the sight of a little violence."

"If we're to go to Vermont, George—"

"As soon as breakfast is finished we can go down to the training field," George said, the matter settled as far as he was concerned.

Sibby enjoyed his finnan haddie. He could see Consuela writhing at the enforced delay. Shortly after breakfast she had expected to be in Greg Foster's arms. The frustration smothered her, and yet the

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undertone of threat in George's words couldn't be ignored.

After breakfast they drove down to the training field, George in his Ferrari, and Sibby and Consuela in the Thunderbird convertible. If George had noticed the two wicker picnic baskets in the back of the Thunderbird—one for Sibby, who would actually spend the day alone, and one for Consuela and Greg Foster—he gave no sign of it.

The new horse, already saddled and waiting for George, was being walked up and down at the edge of the training field by a groom. It was a magnificent black animal, head held high, a light of challenge in wide-set eyes. Consuela pulled the Thunderbird up parallel to the fence surrounding the training field. George had already left the Ferrari and was walking toward the horse. He took over the reins from the groom and led the horse over to where Sibby and Consuela waited.

"Isn't he a beauty?" George said. There was a curious note of tenderness in his voice which was quite unexpected to Sibby. George rubbed the horse's nose gently. "He can jump over the moon—if he wanted to. But he has a bad habit of running out. This morning he'll be cured—once and for all."

George reached into the pocket of his gabardine riding coat and brought something into view. Sibby felt the small hairs rise on the back of his neck. What George held in his hand was a short length of steel, linked tire chain. He swung up into the saddle and sat there, smiling down at Consuela He was part of the horse—a centaur.

They cantered off down the field —man and horse one.

"I am about to be given an object lesson," Consuela whispered, and her body, pressed back against Sibby, shuddered.

The field was spotted with jumps —fence and rail, brush, stone walls, with white-painted rail wings marking the entrance to each jump. Directly opposite the Thunderbird was a stone wall that looked to Sibby about five feet tall. Down the field George had turned the black horse toward that wall.

"So gentle, so tender!" Consuela said between clenched white teeth.

Down the field toward the jump came horse and man, first at a canter, then faster and faster. There was a thunder of hoofs, an almost shattering sense of power in the great black animal. Sibby felt himself gripping the top of the car door. They were almost at the wings of the jump when the big black head went down and the horse veered out to the right. At the same instant the steel chain glittered in the morning sunlight as George slashed viciously at the right side of the horse's head. Something like a scream came from the animal—head suddenly flung up—and then a wild rearing and bucking. The chain rose and fell again.

The horse was suddenly still,

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shaking and trembling—but still. George turned him and came back along the fence. Sibby stared, fascinated, his eyes wide, his mouth dry. Consuela had lowered her face into her arms which she had crossed on the car's steering wheel. Two bloody welts showed on the right side of the horse's head, and its right eye was beginning to swell shut. George leaned forward, stroking the suddenly sweat-wet black neck.

"He'll learn," George said cheerfully. "Next time—or the time after." There was a twisted smile on his lips as he glanced at Consuela, head buried in her arms.

George cantered back down the field, turned the big horse, and started forward again toward the jump. The great horse came with a rush, with all the power of a gigantic machine. Then just at the jump it made a supreme effort to do away with its tormentor. Instead of veering out, the horse leaped to the right, twisting and writhing in a wild effort to buck off the rider.

Not even half an inch of daylight showed between the rider and the leather of the saddle. The chain rose and fell—once, twice, a third time. The great black horse went down almost to its knees, shaking its bloody head like a punch-drunk fighter. George's skillful hands on the reins lifted the horse up, and the animal stood for a moment, head lowered, shaking from nose to tail.

Then George once more guided him back along the fence toward the Thunderbird. The right side of the horse's head was bloody, the right eye closed. The beautiful body was in a lather of sweat."

"Bet on the next one, Sibby?" George asked, his voice mocking. But while he spoke he patted the black shoulder in front of him gently.

Then down the field again. And once more the start toward the stone-wall jump. Faster and faster they came. Something must give, Sibby thought. Just before they reached the white painted wings the steel chain glittered again in the sunlight, but this time it did not strike the horse. It swished down beside the horse's head without touching, and the magnificent animal jumped—like a creature headed for the moon. It seemed to Sibby that the horse cleared the jump with three feet to spare.

As George reined in his mount he leaned forward, almost cooing at the horse as he stroked and patted it. "Good boy! Good boy!"

He swung out of the saddle as he reached the Thunderbird. He was instantly concerned with the horse's bleeding jaw and swollen eye. "You had to learn, boy," he whispered. "We all have to learn." He gave crisp instructions to the groom who trotted over to take the horse. Warm water—epsom salts—to be walked until he was dead cool even if it took all morning.

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"I'll attend to his feeding myself," George told the groom.

Then he leaned on the fence and lit a cigarette. Consuela had not yet looked at him.

"Seem brutal to you, Sibby?" George asked, taking a deep drag on his cigarette.

"It worked," Sibby said. His heart was beating against his ribs. As he had known all along, George was the perfect instrument for violence.

"He'll jump over the top of Madison Square Garden come November," George said. "He's learned the facts of life and he'll be none the worse for it. Well, children, have a nice picnic."

Consuela started the car without once looking at her husband. Gravel spun under the wheels. She raced away down the winding country road, her eyes straight ahead.

"Not me!" she suddenly cried out. "Not me! Not ever!"

"He's the soul of gentleness—after the fact," Sibby observed, smiling to himself.

About twenty miles from the Conrad place Consuela turned off the highway onto a narrow dirt road. They came to a stop in cool pine woods, overlooking a jewel of a small lake. From somewhere in the woods Greg Foster appeared. A blond Viking, all muscle and animal vitality, Sibby thought. Foster scarcely acknowledged Consuela's introduction. He was an eager man.

Consuela took one of the picnic baskets out of the car.

"Come back around four this afternoon, Sibby dear," Consuela said. She was already leaning back in the curve of Foster's arm.

"We're grateful to you, Mr. Salazar," Foster said.

"Think nothing of it," Sibby said, and slid behind the wheel of the Thunderbird.

When Sibby returned to the pine woods at four o'clock, Consuela and Foster were ready for him. Their picnic basket was repacked. Sibby, looking at them, thought only a blind man could miss the fact that these two were lovers who had loved. He thought of George Conrad, the steel tire chain held ready in his powerful right hand . . .

"Tomorrow at the same time?" Foster pleaded.

"If Sibby will conspire with us," Consuela said.

"Bless you, my children," Sibby said.

Only tomorrow it would be different. Tomorrow, just before they left, Sibby would let George Conrad know where he could find his wife and her lover. "*I don't like to bear tales, George, but I really can't be a party to this kind of deception.*"

George would take care of the rest of it.

That evening at the Conrad's was without tensions except those within Sibby himself. If George Conrad had the remotest idea of

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what the day had involved he gave no indication of it. Consuela was relaxed and lazy. She gave George an imaginary account of the territory she and Sibby were supposed to have covered on their picnic jaunt. George listened, politely disinterested.

Almost immediately after dinner George excused himself. He planned to be up early in the morning to take the black horse on a cross-country ride.

"Got to face him with every kind of jump the countryside offers," he said. He gave Sibby a curt nod, and departed.

Consuela and Sibby remained for a while at the candlelit dining-room table, with black coffee and an excellent brandy. The candle flames produced an illusion of bright eagerness in Consuela's blue eyes.

"Naughty girl," Sibby said softly.

"Oh, Sibby!" The words were spoken on a sigh of contentment.

"He'll kill you if he finds out," Sibby said, nodding toward the door through which George had made his exit.

"He can only find out through you, Sibby dear," she said. "You're the perfect front."

"It's not particularly flattering to my manhood," Sibby said.

'Oh, don't be absurd, Sibby dear." She moved in her chair, as though her body anticipated rather than remembered. "Would you think it very rude, Sibby, if I left you to your own devices? This child needs sleep—sleep—sleep."

She wants to enjoy her anticipation alone, Sibby thought.

But early to bed was not Sibby's dish. He had his own anticipating to do. Tomorrow he would be masterminding a new and deliciously thrilling experience.

Sibby poured himself another brandy and made his way to the library. Perhaps he could find something to read that would pass the time till he felt sleepy. But he could find nothing that would hold his attention. No book or magazine could possibly interest him as much as savoring the prospect of tomorrow.

There were French doors opening from the library onto a flagstone terrace. The hot August day had been followed by a cool starlit night, and Sibby carried his brandy out to the terrace and settled down in a comfortable wicker armchair.

He was just lighting a cigarette when he saw Consuela. She was moving quickly, almost stealthily, down across the lawn toward the stable. A wave of disgust crept over Sibby. An assignation in the stable—like a cheap peasant woman. Tasteless! Vulgar! He would have no regrets after all, Sibby told himself.

He watched her disappear into the stable. He felt a slight tremor go over his body. It might be worthwhile watching, he thought. It would remove any hesitation on his part for tomorrow's plan.

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He smoked his cigarette down to the end and reached over to put it out in the ashtray on the wicker side-table.

Then he saw George Conrad, moving purposefully across the lawn toward the stable. Ice congealed Sibby's veins. George had stumbled on the truth. George would find Consuela and Greg and it would all be over before Sibby had a chance to mastermind his part of it.

At least he must see it happen! He must be there to watch—to look—

Sibby was actually sweating as he ran noiselessly across the lush green grass. As he got close to the stable he hesitated, motionless, listening. There should be angry, violent voices. There was nothing—except the sudden clanking of a chain.

Sibby crept forward and let himself in through the tackroom door. The others must be beyond, in the stable itself. He opened a well-oiled door at the far end of the tackroom and moved into the stable. Half a dozen equine heads looked out over the top of box-stall doors.

Suddenly Sibby wanted to scream, and he fought with all his might to prevent it. The moonlight illuminated a violence so dreadful that Sibby couldn't bear to look.

George Conrad lay on the stable floor, and standing over him was Consuela, methodically beating his head with a short length of tire chain.

Sibby pressed back against the wall, praying that by some magic it would give way so that he could fly out through the night.

Consuela, her lovely profile now angular and hard in the pale light, stopped her murderous hailing of George. Then she dropped the chain and bent over George. She was breathing hard.

And then she laughed.

And then she took George by the feet and dragged him toward one of the box stalls. Sibby recognized the bruised black head of the magnificent jumper, its ears at the alert, its good left eye showing white at the rims.

"Back, boy," Consuela said.

She let go of George's legs and opened the stall door. And then she pulled George's body into the stall with the black horse. She came out a moment later and closed the stall door. She bent and picked up the bloody length of tire chain.

It was only then that Sibby noticed she was wearing gloves.

"They won't hang you for this, boy," Consuela crooned at the black horse. And then she struck the wounded side of the black horse's head with the chain.

The horse screamed, reared—and kept rearing. Sibby closed his eyes. Powerful iron-shod hoofs were pounding what remained of George Conrad. Consuela watched, smiling—yes, smiling. And then she tossed the bloody chain into the stall with the horse and her dead husband.

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Sibby knew a kind of sick uncertainty. Consuela was suddenly a predatory killer, no longer a defenseless and foolish girl. If she could kill once in this brutal fashion she could kill again. Sibby felt he'd never be able to hide his knowledge from her. With the sweet smell of blood overpowering him he could not think clearly how to handle the situation.

He watched her. She took a deep breath and started to run toward the house. He guessed the next step. She would call for help. She'd heard the horse screaming in the barn, she'd gone down and found George crushed by those iron hoofs. George, she would say, had been disciplining the horse again, and the enraged animal had turned on him, murderous, deadly.

Sibby knew that if he came face to face with Consuela now, she would see, her senses sharply alert, that he knew the truth. Her reaction would be unpredictable. He needed time to erase the state of his emotions before she saw him. He needed a chance to decide exactly how he would behave.

The little Volkswagen in which he'd driven to the country was parked about a hundred yards away. He would hurry to it and drive away before the alarums and excursions were sounded. He would say, later, that left alone by his host and hostess and unable to sleep, he had gone for a drive on that beautiful August night. He would say he had seen nothing, heard nothing. Later he could decide what to do. But he must get away fast before anyone knew he could have witnessed any part of it.

He ran in the shadow of the shrubbery toward his little car. He was strangling for breath when he slid behind the wheel and raced away.

He drove without headlights at first, until he was out of sight of the house. The last thing he heard as he drove away were excited voices and Consuela's hysterical screaming.

What an act she was putting on!

At last he switched on the headlights. He needed them because the road wound down a mountain side toward the village. His hands gripped the wheel.

And then he felt something cold and hard at the back of his neck.

"Pull over to the side of the road, Mr. Salazar," a harsh voice said. "This is loaded and I'll blow your brains out if you hesitate for an instant."

The brakes screamed and the little car came to a halt just by the white guard-rail. Terrified, Sibby slowly turned his head. The voice behind the gun belonged to Greg Foster.

"I'm sorry about this," Foster said, almost apologetically. "But I just can't let you go to the police, you know. I saw you go to the barn and I knew what you would do, so I hid in the back of your car, waiting for you."

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Sibby opened his mouth, but no sound came out.

"It's a dreadful thing," Foster said, "but she had no choice. It was him or her, Mr. Salazar. I offered to do it, but she insisted it was safer this way. You were meant to be a witness to his cruelty to the horse—but not to this. I'm sorry."

"I won't tell," Sibby whispered. "I promise! I swear!"

"She has a right to a full life, Mr. Salazar—a right to happiness. I'm afraid we could never trust you. You would threaten us all our lives, and we just can't have that."

"Oh, *please!*" Sibby cried, like a small child.

Then something exploded inside his head as Foster brought down the gun butt. Sibby slumped forward over the wheel.

Foster got out of the car, then raised Sibby's body slightly so that he could turn the front wheels toward the guard rail. He put the car in gear and jumped back. The little Volkswagen smashed through the rail, started crazily down the hillside, and then began to somersault, making lazy wheeling turns in the air, and finally smashed itself to bits when it hit bottom about six hundred feet below.

Foster turned and walked quietly back toward the Conrad house.

A half hour later, in the library of the Conrad house, Consuela sat in a big green-leather armchair, her face white, her eyes red from weeping. Greg Foster stood just behind the chair, a comforting hand on her shoulder. They were the perfect picture of a grief-stricken wife and a solicitous friend.

There were two State Troopers in the room, one by the door, the other, a sergeant, standing by Consuela's chair, notebook in hand.

"If you'd prefer to talk about this tomorrow, Mrs. Conrad—" the sergeant began deferentially.

"I'd rather get it over with, Sergeant Martin," Consuela said, her voice exhausted. "George—my husband—had his own individual theories about training horses. Outside the training exercises he was gentleness and kindness itself. But in the training period he was heavy-handed—some people might think, cruel. That—that horse—it had a bad habit of running out at a jump. George had been trying to cure the horse of the habit by striking him alongside the head with a piece of tire chain. You've seen the horse—you've seen its head and damaged eye. That was done this morning.

"Tonight, George must have gone down to the stable to see how the horse was. He had taken care of it after the morning session. He'd fed it and bathed its wounds. Perhaps it's difficult to understand how a man who could beat a horse with a steel chain could also love it. But that was George. But the horse—well, obviously it hadn't forgotten or forgiven. When it found itself

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in the close quarters of the box stall with George it took its revenge.

"George must have tried to defend himself with the chain which you found in the stall. But that black brute was too much for him. I could hear the horse screaming with fury all the way up here at the house, but, God help me, I was too late to help."

"It seems open and shut," Sergeant Martin said.

"It only seems that way, Sergeant," said a dry, acidulous voice from the doorway.

Consuela stiffened. Greg Foster took a quick step back from the chair, his face suddenly white with shock.

Standing in the doorway was the bloody specter of Sibby Salazar. He was holding a handkerchief to a bleeding wound at the back of his head. His white linen suit was torn and stained with grass and dirt. His narrowed eyes were fixed on Consuela. She looked back at him, her eyes feverish—pleading, threatening.

"Only the good die young, my sweet," Sibby said.

"Who are you?" Sergeant Martin asked.

"Sebastian Salazar, a house guest," Sibby said.

"I—I told you Mr. Salazar had gone for a drive in his car, Sergeant," Consuela said. The cords in her neck stood out.

"Mr. Salazar did not go for a ride," Sibby said. "Mr. Salazar was headed for the trooper barracks to report a murder."

"Murder!" the Sergeant said sharply.

"If you'll take the trouble to search Mr. Foster I think you will still find a gun in his pocket. Even if he has tried to wipe it clean I think you will find traces of flesh and hair on its butt. My flesh and my hair, Sergeant. You see," Sibby drawled, "Mr. Foster tried to kill me, too."

"Too?"

Sergeant Martin took a quick step toward Foster who seemed to have gone into a trance. The gun was still in his coat pocket.

"You see, Sergeant," Sibby said, "I was an eyewitness to the murder. I saw Mr. Foster go to the stable and wait there for Mr. Conrad." *Try to kill me, will you, buster?* Sibby's eyes said.

"Sibby!" Consuela whispered.

"Young Mr. Foster has long been infatuated with Mrs. Conrad," Sibby went on coolly. "I suspected there might be trouble when I saw George Conrad go down to the stable. I followed—unfortunately arriving too late to prevent Mr. Foster from beating George to death with that tire chain and dragging him into the stall with the horse. Then I saw him strike the horse with the chain so that the animal, maddened by pain, would seem to have trampled George."

"No!" Foster cried out.

Sibby shrugged. "I am no physi-

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cal match for a man of Foster's physique—especially a man in such a murderous mood. I waited for him to leave and then I ran for my car. But he must have seen me. When I was halfway down the mountain he rose up from the back of my car, put a gun to my head, and forced me to stop. Then he struck me over the head and launched the car through the guard rail and down the mountain side. It's a miracle that I'm here, Sergeant. He hadn't shut the door properly, and with the first lurch of the car I was thrown out. Apparently he didn't notice that or I wouldn't be here. The car is smashed to pieces, but luckily it didn't burn. You should be able to find some of Mr. Foster's fingerprints in the wreckage."

Sibby looked at Foster. He wanted to laugh. The romantic idiot would play it noble to the very end.

Sibby's narrowed eyes then turned to meet Consuela's shocked and incredulous stare. He smiled. *You can save him by telling the truth,* his smile said. *But you won't. Your own hide is far too important to you. But from now on, Consuela, I control that hide and all that goes with it. You can't use me, my pet, and then step on me like a bug.*

Then Sibby played the scene out. He moved over and knelt in front of Consuela He took her burning hands in his. "I'm so sorry, poor dear Consuela," he said. Sergeant Martin couldn't see the laughter in his heavy-lidded eyes. "You and George — poor George — had so much to live for. But you know you can count on me, darling, to help you through it."

Her lips moved and the words behind them must have matched the loathing in her eyes. But the words weren't spoken, because Sibby pressed his cool fingertips against those lips.

"Don't try to thank me now, my darling," he said, the needle sharp as ever.

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DETECTIVE SHORT NOVEL — *complete!*

It wasn't an easy assignment for Stuart Bailey, licensed private investigator. Glen Callister expected to be murdered aboard his ocean-going schooner on the voyage to Honolulu, and he was sure who was planning to do it—half sure, anyway. But while half a loaf may be better than no loaf in certain circumstances, half a solution wasn't worth the $500 retainer that Callister had given Bailey—or even, for that matter, a plugged nickel . . .

DEATH AND THE SKYLARK

by ROY HUGGINS

If it hadn't been for the yachts tied up at its long row of slips, the Los Angeles Yacht Anchorage would have looked like an abandoned fish hatchery. But the yachts were there, and as I went on down the floating boardwalk looking for the *Skylark*, I began to wonder if it wasn't about time for me to raise my rates.

"The *Skylark*'s a fore-and-aft schooner," the man at the lunchroom had told me. Which didn't really help me very much. I wouldn't have recognized a fore-and-aft schooner if one had sailed right through my living room.

But about halfway down the walk I slowed to look at a boat that seemed somehow different from the rest, set low and long in the water, with slender lines and two high masts, and woodwork that appeared to have taken the polish of loving hands for a century or so. I looked for a nameplate and couldn't find one, but there seemed to be someone aboard, back at the stern.

I stepped down onto the narrower walk that ran alongside the ship and went on to the boarding ladder. Someone was there all right—a paunchy man in faded denims and a cork hat. He was sitting in a deep-sea fishing seat attached to the deck and reading a paper that looked suspiciously like the *Wall Street Journal*.

I waited to see if he'd look up, and when he didn't I called out, "Could you tell me where I'll find the *Skylark*?"

"This is it," he said, peering down at me over his shoulder. He had the uneven, rumbling voice of a man who has grown fat in his fifties.

"I'm looking for Glen Callister," I said.

"I'm Callister."

"I'm Bailey. Thought you'd be expecting me."

"Oh." He stood up quickly and came over to the rail. "I was expecting a man more my own age. Don't know why exactly. Come on aboard."

I came aboard.

Glen Callister turned out to be a smaller man than he looked from the walk, only five feet six or less, with a barrel chest and legs that wanted to

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bow just a little. He shook my hand, gave me a pleasant smile that said he'd forgive me for being the wrong age, and suggested we talk down in the "main salon."

The open companionway was about at the center of the ship, the cockpit just a few feet back of it. I went down the steps first and Callister gestured toward a door at the end of the passage. He squeezed past me at the door and opened it, and I followed him into a room that was as unexpected as *crêpes suzettes* at a picnic.

It was a large room filled with sun from a center skylight and the odor of fine scotch from a built-in bar. There were couches in soft beige on two sides of the room, a built-in refrigerator paneled in Philippine mahogany, a fireplace with a polished copper chimney, and a square grand piano attached firmly to one of the bulkheads.

Callister indicated one of the couches and carefully closed the door. He crossed the room and closed another door to what appeared to be the galley, came back to the center of the room, and glanced anxiously up at the half-open skylight. He took off the cork hat and sat down, running a hand through his silver-white hair.

He coughed shortly and said, "Well, what's the good word? Making the trip with us?"

"I'd like to, yes," I said, making it sound more like, "Maybe."

"What does that mean?"

"I've got a few questions to ask."

"Shoot. No, wait." Once again he peered up at the skylight, stood up and walked out of the room. While I waited, I took his letter out of my pocket and reread it for the fifth time.

The letter had dropped through my office mail slot the afternoon before. It said simply and dispassionately that he was making a trip to Honolulu on his schooner, the *Skylark*, with himself as captain, and that he expected to be killed on the voyage.

The murder would be attempted either by his wife or his first mate, he wasn't sure which. He had recently discovered that they were "carrying on illicitly behind my back." He wanted to know if I would come along and keep an eye on Madden—that was the first mate. If so, I was to come down and see him the next day. That was all.

It had taken the rest of the day for me to consider the letter seriously. By the time I got to bed I was beginning to think it could just be, and the next morning the notice for the office rent arrived. I decided it couldn't do any harm to go down to the harbor and see what it was all about.

I was putting the letter away when Callister came back. He had closed the skylight. He shut the door carefully again and said, still standing, "All right, you had some questions."

"The first one's pretty obvious. If you know one of them's going to try to kill you on this trip, why make it?"

"I never ran away from a fight in my life," he said matter-of-factly.

"You say *one* of them intends to kill you. Don't you know which it is?"

He sat down. "I don't think I'll answer that one yet."

I let that pass. "If Madden intends to kill you, do you think having me aboard will stop him?"

"Do you?"

"No."

"Do you want the job?"

"I'm not sure I made myself clear."

"You made yourself clear in exactly

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the way I hoped you would. No one could guarantee anything on a job like this. Do you want it? You'll be passed off as a business associate. We don't talk business on the *Skylark*, so you won't have to worry about that."

"Sure," I said. "I'd love to make the trip. Will your first mate be able to sail the boat after he rubs you out?"

Callister looked at me blankly for about ten seconds. Then he suddenly exploded in a laugh that came from the belt up. He laughed painfully for a full two minutes.

He stood up, and still fighting a little for breath, pulled a folded check from his pocket and handed it to me. It was a cashier's check for $500, made out to cash—a handsome and discreet retainer.

He was getting ready to laugh again. "Be here Tuesday morning at nine," he managed, slapping me on the shoulder. "We're going to have a fine trip."

I could still hear him laughing when I stepped down onto the boardwalk to go back to my car.

Tuesday seemed a long time coming around, but it did, and at nine sharp I climbed onto the deck of the *Skylark* with my suitcase and shave kit. A man's head poked up from the companionway and a pair of moody eyes gave me a quick sizing up.

"Mr. Bailey?" he asked, politely enough, and I was grateful to him for asking it—for all I knew Callister had supplied me with a new name to go with my status as a business associate.

I told him I was Bailey and he said he was Owen Madden and came on up to shake my hand. He was wearing jeans and a T-shirt and no hat. The wind had been doing just the right thing with his dark, curly hair, giving it that careless, ungroomed look that is a sheer deadfall for a certain kind of woman. He was an inch taller than I, as lean as an antelope, and wearing a tan that you can get only by mixing plenty of salt and wind with your ultraviolet. He looked about twenty-eight.

He took me below and opened a door at the right of the steps, showing me a room with two bunks, a wide chest of drawers, and not much else. "We bunk in here. The head's just across the passage. Shower, too."

I put my stuff on the floor and he offered to show me the rest of the boat.

The master's cabin was at the stern, a larger room with its own shower. The Callisters had already moved in—there were some shirts and denims on top of a cabinet, not yet put away; beside them several pipes, a ball of white string, and a book on fishing.

Next we went to the lounge, which Madden called the "gingerbread hatch," and then to the galley, which had a big old-fashioned wood stove in it, a large refrigerator, and space for one person—if he didn't breathe deeply.

I looked skeptically at the stove and asked, "Who chops the wood for it? And where?"

He grinned pleasantly and said, "Burns Diesel oil," and opened one of the doors off the galley to a small room with a bed covered by a lacy spread.

"This is where I usually hang my sack," he said, "but I guess Callister thought I'd better bunk with you instead of with his daughter."

"The tyrant," I said. "I didn't know she was coming this trip."

"She always comes," he said noncommittally, and opened another door in the galley bulkhead to show me a gloomy, disordered space filled with

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canned goods. "Crew's quarters," he said. "When we carry a crew, that is. There's another hatch up there in case of emergencies."

We walked back through the lounge and up the companionway.

"Are we carrying a crew this trip?" I asked.

"Nope. We seldom do. She's a sweet boat, the *Skylark*. Bold and sea-kindly. Built fifty years ago, when they really built 'em."

On deck, he stepped into the cockpit and without wasting words got down to the business of explaining what would be expected of me. He showed me how to operate what he called the "Iron Mike," an electric pilot that did the actual work for the man on watch, and explained that each of us would do a trick at the wheel four hours, then be off for twelve or sixteen, depending on how it worked out. Callister, he said, insisted on having the 4 a.m. to 8 a.m. trick, so he could sit in his fishing seat and try to reel in an albacore or barracuda for the table.

"Ever taken a trip this long on a schooner?"

"The closest I've ever been to a schooner was at Joe's Bar & Grill."

"You'll enjoy the trip," he said. "I been hanging around boats for ten years—since I was fifteen—and I never saw a boat as sweet as this."

"You're pretty young to have a first mate's papers."

"That's a laugh. The skipper calls me that, and treats me like it. But I'm a seagoing bum, period."

He went back to the briefing then, and he was showing me how to lash the wheel when a girl came aboard. I saw her before he did; she walked along the float with a long clean stride, and she was wearing white shorts and the air of easy self-confidence that you get with a figure like hers. When she came over the side, Madden looked up and greeted her casually.

She smiled and said, "Hi. Everybody aboard?"

"Just me and Mr. Bailey here. This is Betty Callister, Mr. Bailey—the skipper's daughter."

She looked at me with a puzzled frown and said, "You're . . . I don't understand. Dad said he'd known you in business for over twenty years." She paused and added dryly, "You must have started young."

I wasn't sure, but I thought Madden looked at me sharply. I said, "The business used to belong to my father."

"Well, I think it was nasty of Dad not to prepare me for you. Where's Mrs. Bailey?"

"Did he tell you I was married?"

"As a matter of fact, he didn't."

"Then it's safe to tell you." I grinned. "I'm not."

"Maybe not so safe, either. A bachelor aboard. This is absolutely revolutionary."

"Oh? What category do you put me in?" Madden asked lightly.

Betty threw him a quizzical glance and drawled, "Now you don't want me to answer that, do you, Owen?"

And with that she turned and went below, leaving us standing there with nothing to say.

The morning was gone, the sun was high and hot, and the Callisters still hadn't put in an appearance. So I walked up to the Anchorage Cafe and had some lunch at a pale green table overlooking the Navy yard across the way. I was just finishing the third cup

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of coffee and wondering if I should take time for another when Betty Callister came in, glanced around, and walked over.

She sat down without being asked, and the proprietor came around from behind the counter, saying, "Salutations, Miss Callister. What can I get you?"

"Just some tea, Harry."

"And I'll have another coffee," I said.

"Maybe I oughta just put the urn on the table," Harry said. "This is your fifth, ain't it?"

Betty shuddered. "How much of that stuff do you drink a day?"

"Never more than twenty cups."

"Doesn't it keep you awake? Twenty cups?"

"Well, it helps."

Betty laughed generously at that.

"Your father and mother arrive yet?" I asked, after Harry had served us.

"Don't let Eilene hear you call her that. You'll walk the plank. No, they haven't."

I waited for her to get started. She certainly hadn't come up for tea—she hadn't even bothered to pour any into the cup.

After a while she said abruptly, "What's this all about, Mr. Bailey?"

"What?"

"This trip?"

"How do you mean?"

"That's what I'm asking you. Several days ago Dad said an old business acquaintance of his would be going along—a man he'd known for twenty years or more. That was why I couldn't go this time, he told me."

She was waiting for me, but I didn't say anything.

"Then you turn up. I'll give you ten dollars for every year you're over thirty."

"Want to pay me the twenty bucks now, ma'am, or later?"

She grimaced and said, "I'm serious. Dad always takes me on trips, no matter what. This time I had to threaten to do something horrible before he'd agree to let me go. Why? If you're an old business acquaintance, I'm Minnie Mouse."

"Well, Minnie, my relationship with your father is just what he said—business. We expect to work out a very important deal on this trip."

"You sound as if you're telling the truth."

"I am."

She looked at me searchingly for a long moment, then seemed to relax. "Then—we might be seeing a lot of you—Dad, I mean."

"That depends on how the deal goes," I said, and almost choked on it.

"What's your first name?"

"Stuart."

"Mind if I call you that?"

"If we have to be formal."

"Well, mine's Betty, Stuart, and I think we should be getting back."

"Shall we take your tea with us?"

She laughed and said, "Never touch the stuff."

She had a nice laugh, easy and soft, and it did wonderful things to her face, putting a dimple into one cheek, deepening its warmth and color, and darkening the already dark blue eyes. Anyway, that's how it hit me as I stood there looking at her and hunting vaguely through my pockets for some change.

At three o'clock I was in my cabin putting things away. The door was

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closed because one of the things I had to put away was my .38 automatic and I was having trouble finding a likely spot for it. I finally settled for one of my shoes, and was just pushing a sock down over it when the Callisters arrived.

I stood up quickly, listening to the sound of their steps on the companionway. I heard a soft voice with just a touch of lately acquired accent saying, "Come on down, Owen. We're having a few martinis first."

A moment later Callister's rumbling baritone echoed from the lounge with "Where's Bailey? Hasn't Bailey . . . ?" Apparently, Betty broke into the question with the news that I was in my cabin, because five seconds later there was a brisk knock on the door.

Callister was standing there smiling broadly, a high flush darkening the pink of his face to a kind of lobster-red. He seemed glad to see me. He clapped me on the back as I stepped out into the passage and asked heartily, "How d'you like your martinis, Bailey?"

"With whiskey and soda," I said as we stepped into the lounge.

Callister got a big bang out of that and he stood there laughing, one hand on my shoulder, while I waited for him to introduce me to the blonde.

She was standing in the center of the room, giving me one of those terribly-at-ease goings-over—the chatelaine inspecting the peasants on festival day. She was a small woman with a round face, large brown eyes, and silver-blonde hair. She may have been only thirty or so, and she thought she looked a good deal less, but there was something about the well-watched figure, the too carefully made-up face, that suggested the other side of thirty-five.

But beyond everything else she was a woman, and one who would never forget it for a moment. She would be making the most of it when people were wondering which side of fifty she was on.

In the meantime Callister had managed to say the right words, and Eilene stepped forward and held out her hand, a little as if trying to make up for the going over. She smiled slowly and gave me a look that went just a wee bit beyond the ordinary amenities of introduction. The way she clasped my hand was brief and proper, but she somehow managed to convey the impression of having held hands with me.

Betty, standing over at the bar, said, "How do you like your martini, Stuart?" Mrs. Callister raised an eyebrow at the "Stuart" and Callister stole my joke: "With whiskey and soda," he chortled, and stepped over to the bar to make me a highball.

Still looking over her shoulder at me, Betty said, "Among other things, I had to agree to be galley rat, pot-walloper, and bartender, to be invited on this jaunt."

I started to reply, but Eilene stepped over, very casually got between me and Betty, and said, "Ever taken a trip like this before, Mr. Bailey?"

"No," I said, and curbed the impulse to ask, "Who has?"

Callister put the highball in my hand and Owen brought over two martinis and gave them to the Callisters. Betty brought two more and gave one to Owen, and we were all standing there with drinks in our hands waiting for somebody to do the obvious thing.

Callister raised his glass, said, "Well, *bon voyage*, everyone," chuckled happily, and drank.

Everybody joined him heartily, in-

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cluding Stuart Bailey, who didn't think for a minute he could keep the old boy from being given the deep six if anyone in this happy party had a mind to try it.

I was leaning back in the cockpit letting Iron Mike do the work for me, wondering whether this was the fourth or fifth day out, and watching the sun stain the water as it began its nightly drop into the drink.

Callister had just gone below after coming up to ask me if I was sure I didn't want a scotch and soda, ". . . . even if you are driving, hah, hah!" He also wanted to tell me Eilene had been asking questions about me. He had told her I was a big manufacturer of experimental equipment.

"That stopped her," he said, and followed it with his characteristic deep-bellied laughter. For a man who expected to be killed, Callister was having himself a great time.

Steps sounded on the companionway, and Eilene Callister went out onto the deck with a double martini glass in one hand and the hem of her white evening gown in the other. She walked toward me, picking her steps, because she was also wearing high heels, stepped down into the cockpit, and put herself carefully beside me with the air of one bringing largess. What she had brought was a heady odor of perfume that went very badly with the sea air.

I wondered if she had planned it this way, waiting until the failing light could give her face a kind of golden warmth and take all trace of hardness from it.

She said, very softly, "May I keep you company, Stuart?"

"Sure. I was beginning to feel neglected."

She looked at me from the corners of her eyes, smiled wryly, and said, "Believe me, if—if things were different, I'd see that you were never neglected."

That wasn't very subtle, and I looked at her sharply and realized, seeing it in the set of her head and the careful raising of her glass, that Eilene was, as Owen might have put it, "primed to the Plimsoll mark." She was a little drunk.

I didn't say anything, and after a while she drew closer, turned toward me a bit more, and said, in a little-girl tone of confidence, "Know why I like you?"

"No. Why do you like me?"

"Because you're modest. You never talk about yourself. My husband's been telling me about you."

"Always smarter to let the other fellow talk for you."

She smiled, looked at me, let the smile slowly go, and just sat there. After a moment she put down the martini and folded her hands in her lap, and went on looking and waiting for me to get started.

Finally she said, whispering now, "You know, there's another reason why I like you."

"What's that?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Because I'm a man?"

Silence. And then she laughed a little, but it was strained and a trifle flat. She said, "That wasn't very funny. It's because . . . well, you respect the fact that I'm married. Believe me, any other man in the world would have been trying to kiss me by now."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Callister. I'll try to do better next time."

Silence again; only this time it

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threatened to be permanent. "Are you," she finally managed in a tiny voice, "being deliberately rude to me?"

"Well, now that you mention it . . ."

That's as far as I got. Madden suddenly appeared in the open companionway, his eyes peering fixedly into the growing darkness around the cockpit. He stepped out onto the deck, and Betty followed him, saying, "Thought we'd get some air. Owen's idea."

Owen scowled at her and walked over to the rail without saying anything or looking toward us.

"Well, if you'll excuse me." Eilene's tone was definitely cold now, unfriendly, and she picked up her martini and disappeared below decks.

Betty came over and sat down beside me. "Hmmm. Hope we didn't interrupt anything."

She said it loudly enough for Owen to hear, and I glanced at her in faint surprise. There was more of the wench in Betty than I'd thought.

Owen turned suddenly and went below without a word.

"That'll be cozy. They're alone at last. Dad's in his cabin lying down."

"Take over for a second. Be right back," I said.

The door to the lounge was closed. I stepped over to Callister's stateroom door and listened. After a moment I heard the sound of his heavy breathing and turned to go down to the lounge door. I listened there too, but there was no sound at all from inside.

I quickly opened the door and stepped in. They literally sprang to their feet from the couch. Owen's mouth was smeared red and Eilene's face was gray beneath the garish color of her make-up.

"Sorry," I said. "We ran out of matches."

I crossed to the bar, picked up a book of matches, and started back. I took two steps, and Owen suddenly came to life, moving forward with one long stride and driving a drop-hammer fist into my face.

I went down like a weight and came up with a grunting whoosh of sound against the refrigerator. He was standing over me with fire in his eye and both fists balled like a pair of grass capstans.

"You didn't come down here for matches," he breathed, "and we both know it."

I didn't say anything. He was right, of course, and in a way I didn't really blame him. I hadn't liked doing it, but I had hoped to open the door on exactly that, in the vague hope that my having seen them might give one of them pause, might even change whatever plans had been made.

"How about stepping back a couple of feet," I said, "so I can get all the way up?"

He didn't move, so I didn't either, and after a minute of that Eilene stepped over in front of him and whispered something I didn't quite get; he shook his head, but finally he moved, turning his back to me. Eilene turned and watched warily as I got to my feet. She put out a hand to my arm.

"Will you do me a great favor, Mr. Bailey? I'm asking it as your hostess. Go back up on deck. And please forget what happened. Will you?"

"Tell *him* to say 'please.'"

Eilene stiffened as she heard Owen swing round again to glare at me.

"Please, Mr. Bailey," she whispered.

"You got it wrong. *He* says 'please.'"

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She just stood there, her eyes moving from my left eye to my right and back to my left. "You're being childish."

"Sure, I'm just a big kid at heart. Tell him to say 'please.'"

There was a little more of the Wimbledon movement with her eyes, and she swung round to Owen.

"Owen," she said tightly, "I don't want this to go on a second longer. I mean it. Do what he says."

Owen stared at her, and whatever it was he saw in her face carried authority, because he finally looked up at me, wet his lips, and said, "Please," in a tone that would have cut a diamond.

I went back up to the wheel.

"Everything all right below?"

"Shipshape."

"Cigarette?"

"Not right now."

"What's the matter?"

"Not a thing."

"Then you won't mind answering a few questions, will you, Stu?"

"Love to."

"I should warn you that anything you say may be held against you."

"It usually is. What's on your mind?"

"You, as usual. But don't get me wrong. I'm not an Eilene. I find you quite resistible, in a nice way."

I didn't have any comment.

"You said you and Dad were going to close a big deal on this trip."

"Uh-huh."

"Funny he doesn't know about it. You were lying."

"All right, I was lying."

There was an abrupt pause, and after a moment she said in a tone of surprise, "Well, we're getting somewhere. Has it something to do with Owen and Eilene? Are you a lawyer or something?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Please. You know what Eilene is, and Owen's gone on her. I'm sure Dad knows about it."

"Seems to me he's the happiest human aboard."

"I know," she whispered. "It's made me wonder. Maybe he *doesn't* know."

"Maybe there's nothing *to* know."

"Look, I'm grown up now, and I'm waiting for an answer."

"Why I'm aboard?"

"Yes."

"Ask your father."

"I'm asking you."

"And I'm not answering. Ask him."

"I can't. He never talks to me. To Dad I'm still five years old. He treated Mother the same way." She sounded almost bitter.

"Do me a favor, will you, Betty?"

She nodded earnestly.

"Don't ask any more questions till we hit Honolulu. I might answer them then."

"There's nothing I can do to persuade you to tell me now?"

"You might try offering your fair young body. I'd probably break down."

"I doubt that very much . . . All right, I'll wait, Stu, and—thanks for being honest with me, at last."

I looked at her. She was lost in something out there across the bow of the ship. It had grown dark now and her profile was etched softly against the moonlight.

I felt a sudden tightening at my throat. This could turn out to be a pretty rugged journey for Betty. Why had Callister allowed her to come?

She turned back to me and smiled slowly. "I knew you were looking at

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me," she whispered. "I think it's the first time you have—really looked, I mean."

"It's the second. I still like it."

"Did Eilene make a pass at you?"

"No."

"You're very kind. Did it work?"

"No."

"I didn't think it would. Well. Guess I'll go down and make with the scoffings—that's sea talk for chow."

"Take it easy on the salt."

"Yes, sir. Easy on the salt. Is your name really Bailey? And are you really not married?"

"Yes, sweet. I'm really not. No more questions."

She made a face at me and got up and went below. And after she'd gone I realized I was alone up there with a million square miles of ocean all around me.

With the exception of a brief but violent squall on about the eleventh day, life aboard the *Skylark* settled down and became singularly uneventful and uneasily pleasant. Eilene and her friend Owen behaved as if the little episode in the lounge had never happened.

Generally we sat around on deck or in the lounge and talked at great length about everything but politics, religion, and ourselves. Now and then Betty would play the piano or Owen would pick up his guitar and sing sea chanties in an off-key baritone. And there was nearly always fresh fish from Callister's morning vigil in the fishing seat.

The squall came up while I was on watch, appearing suddenly off to the southeast—a great swirling bank of black cloud filling the horizon, picking up giant waves and dropping rain as it roared down on us.

I shouted for help and hoped I was doing the right thing when I turned the ship into the wind and lashed the wheel. Betty was on deck first, pulling me with her toward the bow, and shouting something about jibs that I either didn't hear or couldn't understand.

By the time Callister and Owen appeared the squall was on top of us, and Betty, bawling orders at me, had my full attention. We clawed and pulled at the crazed sails and finally, bruised and soaked to the skin, got them lashed tight.

I couldn't see what was going on in the stern and started back there when Betty shouted, "No! Down this way!"

"Gotta give 'em a hand!"

"You'll be in the way! It's a . . ."

The ship lurched sickeningly, and Betty went down on the bucking, rain-washed deck. I stopped arguing and helped her down the forward hatch.

Eilene was sitting in the lounge, clutching the couch with knotted hands, her eyes sick with fear. Betty had stopped off at her cabin to change, and I went on through without a word and I started up the companionway. I stopped because Owen came stumbling down, clutching his left arm. He careered against the door of the head, opened it, pulled out a towel, wrapped the towel around his arm, and made his way into the lounge.

I followed him in and asked, "Where's Callister?" putting more sharpness into it than I had intended.

He was standing there holding the reddening towel. He looked at me, surprised, and said, "Reefing the jib.

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Why?" He sat down under a light.

I turned without saying anything and started out, but the door jarred open and Callister charged in, carrying a first-aid kit. He dropped his slicker onto the rug and stepped over beside Owen.

I stood there looking at him with infinite relief, realizing for the first time that I had become fond of the little man with the big laugh. I had expected never to see him again, not in this world anyway, and I had to get used to the idea that he was still alive and that Madden had skipped a fine opportunity to kill him.

But then again, maybe Owen hadn't had the opportunity. Squalls have a way of keeping you wrapped up in the business at hand.

Callister had attended to Owen's arm and was putting a bandage neatly around it. He said, "Maybe this'll teach you to secure those stays a little better, especially the ones with blocks on 'em."

"Yeah," Owen said, and glowered at Betty as she stepped into the room.

Callister grinned, gave the arm a final pat, and said, "Relax. That'll be healed by tomorrow."

"You're sure of that, huh?" Owen said skeptically.

"Yep. It's because you're young. But don't think me envious, Owen. Being old has its compensations."

Owen stood up and asked unpleasantly, "Yeah? What are they?"

Callister chuckled and said, "Well, for one thing, you don't have so long to live."

The remark was greeted by a dead silence, and Eilene broke into it almost harshly with, "Well! Let's get this party on its feet! I'll mix 'em myself!"

Half an hour later the squall had blown itself out and the party was on its feet. Betty was at the piano, Owen was strumming along with her on the guitar, and Callister was on the couch with Eilene beside him holding one of his broad hands in both of hers. I was leaning against the bulkhead next to the piano, looking at all this and wondering what I was doing there.

And the next morning Glen Callister was shot through the back of the head.

My alarm was set for 7:30 that morning because I was taking the eight o'clock watch, but something woke me about seven o'clock and I looked up, expecting to see Owen up there in his sprawled sleep. His bed was empty.

I threw off the covers, pulled on my denims and shirt, shoved my feet into my tennis shoes, and stepped out into the passage. The lounge doors were both open and I could see Madden down in the galley adjusting the oil valve on the stove.

I walked in, and he glanced up, scowled at me, and offered the usual greeting in a tone that made it sound like, "Drop dead."

"What are you doing up at this hour?" I said.

He held a finger to his lips and gestured at Betty's door directly behind him. "It's this damned arm," he whispered. "Want some coffee?"

"The Old Man up on deck?"

"It's his watch. I'd say he was there."

"Pour two. I'll take him up some."

"Okay. Won't be ready for a while."

I walked back to the head, undressed, showered, dressed again, and came out to find that the coffee still wasn't ready so I went back down to

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the companionway and up onto the deck.

Callister was sitting there, strapped in the fishing seat, as usual, the pole in its socket, the line stretched out in the *Skylark's* wake. But this time he didn't throw me his usual derisive, "Good afternoon!" He didn't do anything at all, because he was dead.

It was what I had been told was to happen, it was the sole reason I was here but somehow I wasn't ready. In some way, perhaps because of last night, or because of his perpetually cheerful attitude, I'd come to believe he'd been wrong that first day on the *Skylark*.

I reached out and touched the soft flesh below his ear. There was warmth there still, but no pulse of life. I picked up the heavy wrist and held it for a long while. Nothing there but the yielding softness and fleeting warmth that told me it had been only a little while. An hour? Or only ten minutes? Why was the body still aboard? Because I had awakened too early and broken into the middle of things? Or was it Madden who had awakened too early?

And then I noticed something significant. I hadn't been looking for it and probably wouldn't have thought of looking for it. But it was obvious enough. The bullet had come out in the center of his forehead, and had gone in an inch lower at the back of his head. I let my eyes follow back along the line the bullet must have traveled. The gun had been held low, and at an upward angle.

I started slowly forward, and, more than fifty feet away, lodged behind the anchor and near the rail, I found it—a slender .30-.30 rifle equipped with a custom-made silencer. It was lying there, as if it had been dropped—or thrown. I glanced to the left. The rifle was on a line with the open forward hatch.

I looked back at Callister and traced an imaginary trajectory from here to the stern, where the old man, his white head bare, sat and grew cold in the warm sun of the morning. I got an ugly picture of someone rising up from the forward hatch, lifting the rifle, and resting it on the ledge. That would give the trajectory, all right.

I could see this blank-faced someone, perhaps in panicked haste, throw the gun over the rail. I could see it hit the rail, hold for a moment, and fall back behind the anchor. It must have been there that the plan had been stopped.

Had I stopped it? Or had Madden?

"Hey, Bailey, what gives?" It was Madden, looking up at me through the galley skylight. "You want coffee up there?"

"No, I'm coming down."

I lowered myself down the forward hatch, stepped into the galley, and watched Owen pour steaming coffee into an oversized mug. "Doesn't he want some moke?" he asked.

"No, he doesn't."

"Too bad. This morning it tastes like coffee. Made it myself."

"I heard that!" It was Betty's voice, and in a moment her door opened and she came out tying her robe around her. I had seen her hair looking better in a light wind, but otherwise she was her usual dew-bright self.

"A little more respect and quiet around here for the graveyard shift," she said. "Suppose there's enough hot water for a shower?"

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"Bailey had one, and he's a very big man," Owen said.

"I took it cold."

"Oh, Spartan, huh?" Betty remarked, squeezing past Owen to step into the lounge and go on down to the shower room.

I took the mug of coffee Owen had poured for me and walked over to one of the lounges. Owen followed me in and sat down, leaning back on one elbow.

"What woke you up this morning?" I said. "Anything special?"

"I answered that once already. The arm."

"You didn't hear anything?"

"Yeah, I thought I heard the Old Man in the galley. Why?"

I didn't say anything.

"Say, what's eating you, Bailey?"

I heard the door at the end of the passage open, and Eilene appeared in a flowing, ice-blue negligee. She had been up for quite a spell, because when she breezed on over and sat down under the glare of the skylight I could see that her make-up was no haphazard job.

"I could smell the coffee, Owen, and I knew you'd made it," she purred. "Pour me some?"

"Sure."

Owen went into the galley.

Eilene smiled at me and said, "Why don't you go up and drag Glen away from that fishing pole? I feel like making breakfast myself this morning."

"Sure," I said. "I'll go up in a second."

Owen came back with two coffees, the extra one for Betty, I gathered. She had turned off the shower and was singing at the top of her voice.

Eilene looked at Owen warmly and asked, "How's the arm?"

"Lousy, thanks."

Betty came in with her hair combed and her face gleaming like a boy soprano, looking a lot less prepared for what was coming than I had ever seen. Owen gave her the coffee and she sat down beside me.

Eilene turned to me again, a bit impatiently now, and said, "Won't you go up and . . ."

"I was just up there," I interrupted. "He can't come down. Someone shot him, Mrs. Callister. He's dead."

Eilene stared at me as if I had said something that didn't make sense. She suddenly turned her eyes to Owen and dropped the hot mug of coffee onto the soft gray carpet. I felt a quick movement beside me, and Betty was on her feet, running blindly from the room.

I waited for something more from the lovers, but Owen just stood there giving Eilene back her stare and saying nothing at all. Finally Eilene dropped her eyes to the brown stain at her feet and looked at it as if it were the most important event of the day.

Owen put his mug aside and took hold of both her arms in a tight and steadying grip. I got up and walked out of the room.

Betty was up there holding onto the stern rail and looking in dry-eyed wonder and despair at the little man sitting with the pole clutched in his right hand, still waiting for a strike. The wind was blowing gently at his soft white hair and the seat moved slowly with the rolling of the boat.

I didn't go to her, but stepped over to the closed skylight over the lounge and leaned down at its edge where my

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shadow would fall away from the glass. I could hear a frantic sibilance of voices from below, but I could make out neither words nor meaning.

The voices stopped and I moved away, going to Betty and stepping between her and the figure in the chair. After a moment she looked up without really seeing me, and I put an arm around her and drew her away. At the companionway she stopped.

"They did it," she choked. "They killed him."

"Betty, listen. Maybe not 'they.' Maybe just one, without the other." Owen was coming up the steps, followed with slow reluctance by Eilene. "Get hold of yourself," I said.

We stepped aside and Owen walked over to the body and picked up the left wrist, fumbling clumsily for a pulse. Eilene didn't come up all the way, just far enough to see him there; then she turned away, her face twisted in an ugly grimace.

Owen dropped the wrist and looked over at me.

"He was shot with a .30-.30," I said. "It's forward behind the anchor, where I found it."

Owen just went on looking at me with a pale fixity for what seemed a long while.

"I know Eilene didn't do this," he said with careful deliberation. "She just told me. And I know Betty wouldn't, couldn't. I also know I didn't. That leaves you, Bailey. I'm putting you under arrest."

"You're . . . !" I wanted to laugh in his face, but somehow the face didn't seem to belong to a kid in his twenties, but to a man, and one who wouldn't go in for loose threats or idle talk.

"Yes," he said. "The captain of the ship is dead. I'm captain now, and responsible for the other passengers. We don't know you, but there's been something phony from the start about your connection with the skipper. I'm going to lock you in your cabin till we hit port. If you try to resist, I've got a right to kill you."

And he meant every word of it.

"Look, Owen, you're in deep enough already. Don't make it any tougher. I've got a letter down in my cabin, from the dead captain. Maybe you ought to read it before you do anything rash."

He thought about that, looking at me and waiting for me to go on.

"Or maybe I'll just tell you what it says. It's an offer of a job to go along on this tea party. I'm a licensed private investigator. The letter states that you and the . . . But maybe you'd rather read it, after all."

"Go ahead. It states what?"

"That you and Mrs. Callister were having an illicit affair, and that one of you, on this trip, intended to kill him."

I could feel the hysteria building and threatening to break in the girl at my side. I took hold of Betty's hand and gripped it tightly.

"Where is this letter?" It was Eilene, her voice sounding suddenly very old.

"I'll get it for you if you want to see it. As long as our new captain here understands that I don't intend to let him have it."

"It doesn't matter," Eilene said wearily. "It would be like him to do a thing like that."

"I want to see that letter," Owen said. "It doesn't make sense to me."

But Eilene didn't seem to have

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heard him. She went on, turning her eyes toward Betty. "There's the one who killed him. Right there."

I felt Betty stiffen with a quick hard movement, but she made no other move, said nothing. Eilene began to speak, looking at Betty, but talking to us, the tone rising slowly and sharpening viciously as she went on, "Two days ago Glen and I came to a complete understanding—about . . . everything."

In the brief pause her eyes had gone to Owen for a moment, then back to Betty. "We talked all through one night, and Glen finally told me he had cut me out of his will—left me one dirty dollar. But before the night was over he'd promised to—to change it back again. I made the mistake of telling Betty about it. I had to crow a little. And it cost—"

"That's a lie!" Betty's words lashed out with cold fury and contempt. "This is the first I've ever heard of—"

"Cut it!" It was Owen's turn to interrupt now. "We'll be in Honolulu in three days and the cops'll decide the question of guilt."

He paused and looked at each of us. This was Owen in his new role, and I had to admit, grudgingly, that he played it well, with a genuine ring of authority.

"Meanwhile," he went on, "we have a burial service to perform."

"Wait a minute!" I said, "You can't send him over the side."

"Listen, mister," Owen said, looking at me as if I had just stepped up from steerage, "we're at least three hot days out of port. We have a dead man aboard. We're burying him. There's a book on sea law below. Maybe you ought to read it."

"Okay," I said. "It's two funerals—his and yours."

He started to answer when Betty suddenly choked. She was standing there frozen, staring in blank unholy terror at the body of Glen Callister.

I looked at the same moment, as Glen Callister's right hand, clasping the rod, shot up stiffly, his body lunged forward, hung there for a terrifying moment of sheer madness, and slumped back as the pole left his hand with a jar of sound and disappeared into the sea.

And over all this came the shrill, mad screaming of Eilene Callister.

(*Continued on page 150*)

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **LILIAN JACKSON BRAUN**

TITLE: ***SuSu and the 8:30 Ghost***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Superior Suda of Siam (SuSu)

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Does anyone write better cat stories—rather, better detective-crime-mystery stories about cats—than Lilian Jackson Braun? We doubt it . . .*

WHEN MY SISTER AND I returned from our vacation and learned that our eccentric neighbor in the wheel chair had been removed to a mental hospital, we were sorry but hardly surprised. He was a strange man, not easy to like, and no one in our apartment building seemed to be concerned about his departure—except our Siamese cat. The friendship between SuSu and Mr. Van was so close it was alarming.

If it had not been for SuSu, we would never have made the man's acquaintance, for we were not too friendly with our neighbors. Our apartment house was very large and full of odd characters who, we thought, were best ignored. On the other hand, the old building had advantages: large rooms, moderate rents, a thrilling view of the river, and a small waterfront park at the foot of the street. It was there that we first noticed Mr. Van.

One Sunday afternoon my sister Gertrude and I were walking SuSu in the park, which was barely more than a strip of grass alongside an old wharf. Barges and tugs sometimes docked there, and SuSu—wary of these monsters—preferred to stay away from the water's edge. It was one of the last nice days in November. Soon the river would freeze over, icy winds would blow, and the park would be deserted for the winter.

SuSu loved to chew grass, and she

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was chewing industriously when something diverted her attention and drew her toward the river. Tugging at her leash, she insisted on moving across the grass to the boardwalk, where a middle-aged man sat in a most unusual wheel chair.

It was made almost entirely of cast iron, like the base of an old-fashioned sewing machine, and it was upholstered in worn plush. With its high back and elaborate ironwork, it looked like a mobile throne, and the man who occupied this regal wheel chair presided with the imperious air of a monarch. It conflicted absurdly with his shabby clothing.

To our surprise this was the attraction that lured SuSu. She chirped at the man, and the man leaned over and stroked her fur.

"She recognizes me," he explained to us, speaking with a haughty accent that sounded vaguely Teutonic. "I was-s-s a cat myself in a former existence."

I rolled my eyes at Gertrude, but she accepted the man's statement without blinking.

He was far from attractive, having a sharply pointed chin, ears set too high on his head, and eyes that were merely slits, and when he smiled he was even less appealing. Nevertheless, SuSu found him irresistible. She rubbed his ankles, and he scratched her in the right places. They made a most unlikely pair—SuSu with her luxurious blonde fur, looking fastidious and expensive, and the man in the wheel chair with his rusty coat and moth-eaten laprobe.

In the course of a fragmentary conversation with Mr. Van we learned that he and the companion who manipulated his wheel chair had just moved into a large apartment on our floor, and I wondered why the two of them needed so many rooms. As for the companion, it was hard to decide whether he was a mute or just unsociable. He was a short thick man with a round knob of a head screwed tight to his shoulders and a flicker of something unpleasant in his eyes, and he stood behind the wheel chair in sullen silence.

On the way back to the apartment Gertrude said, "How do you like our new neighbor?"

"I prefer cats before they're reincarnated as people," I said.

"But he's rather interesting," said my sister in the gentle way she had.

A few evenings later we were having coffee after dinner, and SuSu—having finished her own meal—was washing up in the downglow of a lamp. As we watched her graceful movements, we saw her hesitate with one paw in mid-air. She held it there and listened. Then a new and different sound came from her throat, like a melodic gurgling. A minute later she was trotting to the front door with intense purpose. There she sat,

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watching and waiting and listening, although we ourselves could hear nothing.

It was a full two minutes before our doorbell rang. I went to open the door and was somewhat unhappy to see Mr. Van sitting there in his lordly wheel chair.

SuSu leaped into his lap—an unprecedented overture for her to make—and after he had kneaded her ears and scratched her chin, he smiled a thin-lipped, slit-eyed smile at me and said, "*Goeden avond.* I was-s-s unpacking some crates, and I found something I would like to give to you."

With a courtly flourish he handed me a small framed picture, whereupon I was more or less obliged to invite him in. He wheeled his ponderous chair into the apartment with some difficulty, the rubber tires making deep gouges in the pile of the carpet.

"How do you manage that heavy chair alone?" I asked. "It must weigh a ton."

"But it is-s-s a work of art," said Mr. Van, rubbing appreciative hands over the plush upholstery and the lacy ironwork of the wheels.

Gertrude had jumped up and poured him a cup of coffee, and he said, "I wish you would teach that man of mine to make coffee. He makes the worst *zootje* I have ever tasted. In Holland we like our coffee *sterk* with a little chicory. But that fellow, he is-s-s a *smeerlap*. I would not put up with him for two minutes if I could get around by myself."

SuSu was rubbing her head on the Dutchman's vest buttons, and he smiled with pleasure, showing small square teeth.

"Do you have this magnetic attraction for cats?" I asked with a slight edge to my voice. SuSu was now in raptures because he was twisting the scruff of her neck.

"It is-s-s only natural," he said. "I can read their thoughts, and they read mine of course. Do you know that cats are mind readers? You walk to the icebox to get a beer, and the cat she will not budge, but walk to the icebox to get out her dinner, and she will come bouncing into the kitchen from any place she happens to be. Your thought waves have reached her, even though she seems to be asleep."

Gertrude agreed it was probably true.

"Of course it is-s-s true," said Mr. Van, sitting tall. "Everything I say is-s-s true. Cats know more than you suspect. They can not only read your mind, they can plant ideas in your head. And they can sense something that is-s-s about to happen."

My sister said, "You must be right. SuSu knew you were coming here tonight, long before you rang the bell."

"Of course I am right. I am always right," said Mr. Van. "My grandmother in Vlissingen had a tomcat called Zwartje that she

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was-s-s very fond of, and after she died my grandmother came back every night to pet the cat. Every night Zwartje stood in front of *Grootmoeder*'s chair and stretched and purred, although there was-s-s no one there. Every night at half-past eight."

After that visit with Mr. Van, I referred to him as Grandmother's Ghost, for he too made a habit of appearing at 8:30 several times a week. He would say, "I was-s-s feeling lonesome for my little sweetheart," and SuSu would make an extravagant fuss over the man. I was pleased that he never stayed long, although Gertrude usually encouraged him to linger.

The little framed picture he had given us was not exactly to my taste. It was a silhouette of three figures—a man in top hat and frock coat, a woman in hoop skirt and sunbonnet, and a cat carrying his tail like a lance. To satisfy my sister, however, I hung it over the kitchen sink.

One evening Gertrude, who is a librarian, came home from work in great excitement. "There's a signature on that silhouette," she said, "and I looked it up at the library. Auguste Edouart was a famous artist, and our silhouette is over a hundred years old. It might be valuable."

"I doubt it," I said. "We used to cut silhouettes like that in the third grade."

Eventually, at my sister's urging, I took the object to an antique shop, and the dealer said it was a good one, probably worth $150.

When Gertrude heard this, she said, "If the dealer quoted $150, it's worth $250. I think we should give it back to Mr. Van. The poor man doesn't know what he's giving away."

"Yes," I agreed, "maybe he could sell it and buy himself a decent wheel chair."

At 8:30 that evening SuSu began to gurgle and prance.

"Here comes Grandmother's Ghost," I said, and shortly afterward the doorbell rang.

"Mr. Van," I said, as soon as Gertrude had poured his coffee, "remember that silhouette you gave us? We've found out it's very valuable, and you must take it back."

"Of course it is-s-s valuable," he said. "Would I give it to you if it was-s-s nothing but *rommel?*

"Do you know something about antiques?"

"My dear *Mevrouw*, I have a million dollars' worth of antiques in my apartment. Tomorrow evening you ladies must come and see my treasures. I will get rid of that *smeerlap*, and the three of us will enjoy a cup of coffee."

"By the way, what is a *smeerlap*?" I asked.

"It is not very nice," said Mr. Van. "If somebody called me a *smeerlap*, I would punch him in the nose . . . Bring my little sweet-

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heart when you come, ladies. She will find some fascinating objects to explore."

Our cat seemed to know what he was saying.

"SuSu will enjoy it," said Gertrude. "She's locked up in this apartment all winter."

"Knit her a sweater and take her to the park in cold weather," the Dutchman said in the commanding tone that always irritated me. "I often bundle up in a blanket and go to the park in the evening. It is-s-s good for insomnia."

"SuSu is not troubled with insomnia," I informed him. "She sleeps twenty hours a day."

Mr. Van looked at me with scorn. "You are wrong. Cats never sleep. You think they are sleeping, but cats are the most wakeful creatures on earth. That is-s-s one of their secrets."

After he had gone, I said to Gertrude, "He must be off his rocker."

"He's just a little eccentric," she said.

"If he has a million dollars' worth of antiques, which I doubt, why is he living in this run-down building? And why doesn't he buy a wheel chair that's easier to operate?"

"Because he's a Dutchman, I suppose."

"And how about all those ridiculous things he says about cats?"

"I'm beginning to think they're true," said Gertrude.

"And who is this fellow that lives with him? Is he a servant, or a nurse, or a keeper, or what? I see him coming and going on the elevator, but he never speaks—not one word. He doesn't even seem to have a name, and Mr. Van treats him like a slave. I'm not sure we should go tomorrow night. The whole situation is too strange."

Nevertheless, we went. The Dutchman's apartment, we found, was jammed with furniture and bric-a-brac, and Mr. Van shouted at his companion, "Move that *rommel* so the ladies can sit down."

Sullenly the fellow removed some paintings and tapestries from the seat of a carved sofa.

"Now get out of here," Mr. Van shouted at him. "Get yourself a beer," and he threw the man a crumpled dollar bill with less grace than one would throw a bone to a dog.

We sat on the sofa to drink our coffee, while SuSu explored the premises, and then Mr. Van showed us his treasures, propelling his wheel chair through a maze of furniture. He pointed out Chippendale-this and Affleck-that and Newport-something-else. Perhaps they were treasures to him, but to me they were musty relics of a dead past.

"I am in the antique business," Mr. Van explained. "Before I was-s-s chained to this stupid wheel chair, I had a shop and exhibited at all the major shows. Then . . . I was-s-s in a bad auto accident, and now I sell from the apartment. By appointment only."

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"Can you do that succesfully?" Gertrude asked.

"And why not? The museum people know me, and collectors come here from all over the country. I buy. I sell. And my man Frank does the legwork. He is-s-s the perfect assistant for an antique dealer—strong in the back, weak in the head."

"Where did you find him?"

"On a junk heap. I have taught him enough to be useful to me, but not enough to be useful to himself. A smart arrangement, eh?" Mr. Van winked. "He is-s-s a *smeerlap*, but I am helpless without him . . . Hoo! Look at my little sweetheart! She has-s-s made a discovery."

SuSu was sniffing at a silver bowl with two handles.

Mr. Van nodded approvingly. "It is-s-s a caudle cup made by Jeremiah Dummer of Boston in the late 17th century—for a certain lady in Salem. They said she was-s-s a witch. Look at my little sweetheart! She knows!"

I coughed and said, "Yes, indeed, you're lucky to have Frank."

"You think I do not know it?" said Mr. Van. "That is-s-s why I keep him poor. If I gave him wages, he would get ideas."

"How long ago was your accident?"

"Five years, and it was-s-s that idiot's fault! He did it! He did this to me!" The Dutchman's voice rose to a shout, and his face turned red as he pounded the arms of his wheel chair with his fists. Then SuSu rubbed against his ankles, and he stroked her and began to calm down. "Yes, five years ago," he said. "Five years in this miserable chair. We were driving to an antique show in the station wagon. That *smeerlap* went through a red light—fifty miles an hour—and hit a truck. A gravel truck!"

"How terrible!" Gertrude said, putting both hands to her face.

"I still remember packing the wagon for that trip. I was-s-s complaining all the time about sore arches. Hah! What I would give for some sore arches today yet!"

"Wasn't Frank hurt?"

Mr. Van made an impatient gesture. "His-s-s head only. They picked Waterford crystal out of his-s-s cranium for six hours. He has-s-s been *gek* ever since." The Dutchman tapped his temple.

"Where did you find your unusual wheel chair?" I asked.

"My dear *Mevrouw*, never ask a dealer where he found something," said Mr. Van. "This chair is-s-s unique. It was-s-s made for a railroad millionaire in 1872. It has-s-s the original plush. If you must spend your life in a wheel chair, have one that gives some pleasure. And now we come to the purpose of tonight's visit. Ladies, I want you to do something for me."

He wheeled himself to a desk, and Gertrude and I exchanged anxious glances.

"Here in this desk is-s-s a new

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will I have written, and I need witnesses. I am leaving a few choice items to museums, then everything else is-s-s to be sold and the proceeds used to establish a Foundation."

"What about Frank?" asked Gertrude, who is always genuinely concerned about others.

"Bah! Nothing for that *smeerlap!* . . . But before you ladies sign the paper, there is-s-s one thing I must write down. What is-s-s my little sweetheart's full name?"

Gertrude and I both hesitated, and I finally said, "SuSu's registered name is Superior Suda of Siam."

"Good! I will call it the Superior Suda Foundation. That gives me pleasure. Making a will is-s-s a dismal business, like a wheel chair, so give yourself some pleasure."

"What—ah—will be the purpose of the Foundation?" I asked.

Mr. Van blessed us with a benevolent smile. "It will sponsor research," he said. "I want the universities to study the highly developed mental perception of the domestic feline and apply this knowledge to the improvement of the human mind. Ladies, there is-s-s nothing better I could do with my fortune. Man is-s-s eons behind the smallest fireside grimalkin." He gave us a canny look, and his pupils seemed to narrow. "I am in a position to know," he added.

We signed the papers. What else could we do? A few days later we left on our vacation and never saw Mr. Van again.

Gertrude and I always went south for three weeks in winter, taking SuSu with us, and when we returned, the sorry news about our eccentric neighbor was thrown at us without ceremony.

We met Frank on the elevator, and for the first time he spoke! That in itself was a shock.

He said, "They took him away."

"What's that? What did you say?" We both clamored at once.

"They took him away." It was surprising to find that the voice of this chunky man was high-pitched and rasping.

"What happened to Mr. Van?" my sister demanded.

"He cracked up. His folks come from Pennsylvania and took him back home to a nut hospital."

I saw Gertrude wince, and she said, "Is it serious?"

Frank shrugged.

"What will happen to all his antiques?"

"His folks told me to dump the junk."

"But they're valuable things, aren't they?"

"Nah. Junk. He give everybody that guff about museums and all." Frank shrugged again and tapped his head. "He was *gek!*"

Wonderingly my sister and I returned to our apartment, and I could hardly wait to say it: "I told you the Dutchman was unbalanced."

"It's such a pity," she said.

"What do you think of the sudden

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change in Frank? He acts like a free man. It must have been terrible living with that old Scrooge."

"I'll miss Mr. Van," Gertrude said. "He was very interesting. SuSu will miss him, too."

But SuSu, we observed later that evening, was not willing to relinquish her friend in the wheel chair as easily as we had done.

We were unpacking the vacation luggage after dinner when SuSu staged her demonstration. She started to gurgle and prance, exactly as she had done all winter whenever Mr. Van was approaching our door. Gertrude and I stood there watching her, waiting for the bell to ring. When SuSu trotted expectantly to the front door, we followed. She was behaving in an extraordinary manner. She craned her neck, made weaving motions with her head, rolled over on her back and stretched luxuriously, all the while purring her heart out; but the doorbell never rang.

Looking at my watch, I said, "It's eight thirty. SuSu remembers."

"It's quite touching, isn't it?" said Gertrude.

That was not the end of SuSu's demonstrations. Almost every night at half-past eight she performed the same ritual.

"Cats hate to give up a habit," I remarked, recalling how SuSu had continued to sleep in the guest room long after we had moved her bed to another place. "But she'll forget after a while."

SuSu did not forget. A few weeks passed. Then we had a foretaste of spring and a sudden thaw. People went without coats prematurely, convertibles cruised with their tops down, and a few hopeful fishermen appeared down on the wharf at the foot of our street, although the river was still patched with ice.

On one of these warm evenings we walked SuSu down to the park for her first spring outing, expecting her to go after last year's dried weeds with snapping jaws. But the weeds did not tempt her. Instead, she tugged at her leash, pulling toward the boardwalk. Out of curiosity we let her go, and there on the edge of the wharf she staged her weird performance once more—gurgling, arching her back, craning her neck with joy.

"She's doing it again," I said. "I wonder what the reason could be."

Gertrude said softly, "Remember what Mr. Van said about cats and ghosts?"

"Look at that animal! You'd swear she was rubbing someone's ankles. I wish she'd stop."

"I wonder," said my sister very slowly, "if Mr. Van is really in a mental hospital."

"What do you mean?"

"Or is he—down there?" Gertrude pointed uncertainly over the edge of the wharf. "I think Mr. Van is dead, and SuSu knows."

"That's too fantastic," I said. "How could that happen?"

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"I think Frank pushed the poor man off the wharf, wheel chair and all—perhaps one dark night when Mr. Van couldn't sleep and insisted on being wheeled to the park."

"Really, Gertrude—"

"Can't you see it? . . . A cold night. The riverfront deserted. Mr. Van trussed in his wheel chair with a blanket. Why, that chair would sink like lead! What a terrible thing! That icy water. That poor helpless man."

"I just can't—"

"Now Frank is free, and he has all those antiques, and nobody cares enough to ask questions. He can sell them and be set up for life. Do you know what a Newport blockfront chest is worth? I've been looking it up in the library. A chest like the one we saw in Mr. Van's apartment was sold for $40,000 at some auction in the east."

"But what about the relatives in Pennsylvania?"

"I'm sure Mr. Van had no relatives—in Pennsylvania or anywhere else."

"Well, what do you propose we should do?" I said in exasperation. "Report it to the manager of the building? Notify the police? Tell them we think the man has been murdered because our cat sees his ghost every night at eight thirty? We'd look like a couple of middle-aged ladies who are getting a little *gek*."

As a matter of fact, I was beginning to worry about Gertrude—that is, until the morning paper arrived.

I skimmed through it at the breakfast table, and there—at the bottom of page seven—one small item leaped off the paper at me. Could I believe my eyes?

"Listen to this!" I said to Gertrude. "The body of an unidentified man has been washed up on a down-river island. Police say the body apparently has been held under-water for several weeks by the ice . . . About fifty-five years old and crippled . . . No one fitting that description has been reported to the Missing Persons Bureau."

For a moment my sister sat staring at the coffee pot. Then she rose from her chair and went to the telephone.

"Now all the police have to do," she said with a slight quiver in her voice, "is to look for an antique wheel chair in the river at the foot of the street. Cast iron. With the original plush." She blinked at the phone. "Will you dial?" she asked me. "The numbers are blurred."

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David Ely's "The Sailing Club," which first appeared in the October 1962 issue of "Cosmopolitan," was awarded the coveted "Edgar" by the Mystery Writers of America and judged to be the best mystery short story published during 1962.

"Cosmopolitan" described the story "as a classic along with many a story of Hemingway's, Stevenson's, Maugham's — and yet with which it has nothing else easily definable in common."

THE SAILING CLUB

by DAVID ELY

OF ALL THE IMPORTANT SOCIAL clubs in the city, the most exclusive was also the most casual and the least known to outsiders. This was a small group of venerable origin but without formal organization. Indeed, it was without a name, although it was generally referred to as the Sailing Club, for its sole apparent activity was a short sailing cruise each summer. There were no meetings, no banquets, no other functions—in fact, no club building existed, so that it was difficult even to classify it as a club.

Nevertheless, the Sailing Club represented the zenith of a successful businessman's social ambitions, for its handful of members included the most influential men in the city, and many a top executive would have traded all his other hard-won attainments for an opportunity to join. Even those who had no interest in sailing would willingly have sweated through long practice hours to learn, if the Club had beckoned. Few were invited, however. The Club held its membership to the minimum necessary for the operation of its schooner, and not until death or debility created a vacancy was a new man admitted.

Who were the members of this select group? It was almost impossible to be absolutely certain. For one thing, since the Club had no legal existence, the members did not list it in their *Who's Who* paragraphs or in any other catalogue of their honors. Furthermore, they appeared reluctant to discuss it in public. At luncheons or parties, for example, the Club might be mentioned, but those who brought up the name did not seem to be members, and as for those distinguished gentlemen who carefully refrained at such times from commenting on the subject—who could tell? They might be members, or they might deliberately be assuming

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an air of significant detachment in hopes of being mistaken for members.

Naturally, the hint of secrecy which was thus attached to the Sailing Club made it all the more desirable in the eyes of the rising business leaders who yearned for the day when they might be tapped for membership. They realized that the goal was remote and their chances not too likely, but each still treasured in his heart the hope that in time this greatest of all distinctions would reward a lifetime of struggle and success.

One of these executives, a man named John Goforth, could without immodesty consider himself unusually eligible for the Club. He was, first of all, a brilliant success in the business world. Although he was not yet fifty, he was president of a dynamic corporation which had become pre-eminent in several fields through a series of mergers he himself had expertly negotiated. Each year, under his ambitious direction, the corporation expanded into new areas, snapping up less nimble competitors and spurring the others into furious battles for survival.

Early in his career Goforth had been cautious, even anxious, but year by year his confidence had increased, so that now he welcomed new responsibilities, just as he welcomed the recurrent business crises where one serious mistake in judgment might cause a large enterprise to founder and to sink. His quick rise had not dulled this sense of excitement, but rather had sharpened it. More and more, he put routine matters into the hands of subordinates, while he zestfully attacked those problems that forced from him the fullest measure of daring and skill. He found himself not merely successful, but powerful, a man whose passage through the halls of a club left a wake of murmurs, admiring and envious.

This was the life he loved, and his mastery of it was his chief claim to recognition by the most influential social group of all, the Sailing Club. There was another factor which he thought might count in his favor: his lifelong attachment to the sea and to sailing.

As a boy, he had stood in fascination at the ocean's edge, staring out beyond the breakers to the distant sails, sometimes imagining himself to be the captain of a great ship; at those times, the toy bucket in his hand had become a long spyglass, or a pirate's cutlass, and the strip of reed that fluttered from his fingers had been transformed into a gallant pennant, or a black and wicked skull-and-bones.

At the age of ten, he had been taught to sail at his family's summer place on the shore; later, he was allowed to take his father's boat out alone—and later still, when he was almost of college age, he was chosen for the crew of one of the yacht club entries in the big regatta. By that time, he had come to regard the

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sea as a resourceful antagonist in a struggle all the more absorbing because of the danger, and a danger that was far from theoretical, for every summer at least one venturesome sailor would be lost forever, far from land, and even a sizable boat might fail to return from some holiday excursion.

Now, in his middle years, John Goforth knew the sea as something more than an invigorating physical challenge. It was that still, but he recognized that it was also an inexhaustible source of renewal for him. The harsh sting of blown spray was a climate in which he thrived, and the erratic thrusts of strength that swayed his little boat evoked a passionate response of answering strength within himself. In those moments—like the supreme moments of business crisis—he felt almost godlike, limitless, as he shared the ocean's solitude, its fierce and fitful communion with the wind, the sun, and the sky.

As time passed, membership in the Sailing Club became the single remaining honor which Goforth coveted but did not have. He told himself: not a member—no, not yet! But of course he realized that this prize would not necessarily fall to him at all, despite his most strenuous efforts to seize it. He sought to put the matter out of his mind; then, failing that, he decided to learn more about the Club, to satisfy his curiosity, at least.

It was no easy task. But he was a resourceful and determined man, and before long he had obtained a fairly accurate idea of the real membership of the Sailing Club. All these men were prominent in business or financial circles, but Goforth found it strange that they seemed to lack any other common characteristic of background or attainments. Most were university men, but a few were not. There was, similarly, a variety of ethnic strains represented among them. Some were foreign-born, even, and one or two were still foreign citizens. Moreover, while some members had a long association with sailing, others seemed to have no interest whatever in the sea.

Yet just as Goforth was prepared to shrug away the matter and conclude that there was no unifying element among the members of the Sailing Club, he became aware of some subtle element that resisted analysis. Did it actually exist, or did he merely imagine it? He studied the features of the supposed Club members more closely. They were casual, yes, and somewhat aloof—even bored, it seemed. And yet there was something else, something buried: a kind of suppressed exhilaration that winked out briefly, at odd moments, as though they shared some monumental private joke.

As his perplexing survey of the Club members continued, Goforth became conscious of a quite different sensation. He could not be sure,

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but he began to suspect that while he was quietly inspecting them, they in turn were examining him.

The most suggestive indication was his recent friendship with an older man named Marshall, who was almost certainly a Club member. Marshall, the chairman of a giant corporation, had taken the lead in their acquaintanceship, which had developed to the point where they lunched together at least once a week. Their conversation was ordinary enough—of business matters, usually, and sometimes of sailing, for both were ardent seamen—but each time, Goforth had a stronger impression that he was undergoing some delicate kind of interrogation which was connected with the Sailing Club.

He sought to subdue his excitement. But he often found that his palms were moist, and as he wiped them he disciplined his nervousness, telling himself angrily that he was reacting like a college freshman being examined by the president of some desirable fraternity.

At first he tried to moderate his personality, as well. He sensed that his aggressive attitude toward his work, for example, was not in harmony with the blasé manner of the Club members. He attempted a show of nonchalance, of indifference—and all at once he became annoyed. He had nothing to be ashamed of. Why should he try to imitate what was false to his nature? He was *not* bored or indifferent, he was *not* disengaged from the competitive battle of life, and he would not pretend otherwise. The Club could elect him or not, as it chose.

At his next session with Marshall he went out of his way to make clear how fully he enjoyed the daily combat of business. He spoke, in fact, more emphatically than he had intended to, for he was irritated by what seemed to be the other man's ironic amusement.

Once Marshall broke in, wryly, "So you really find the press of business life to be thoroughly satisfying and exciting?"

"Yes, I do," said Goforth. He repressed the desire to add, "And don't you, too?" He decided that if the Sailing Club was nothing but a refuge for burned-out men, bored by life and by themselves, then he wanted no part of it.

At the same time he was disturbed by the thought that he had failed. The Sailing Club might be a worthless objective for a man of his temperament—still he did not like to feel that it might be beyond his grasp.

After he had parted none too cordially from Marshall, he paced along the narrow streets toward the harbor, hoping that the ocean winds would blow away his discontent. As he reached the water's edge, he saw a customs launch bounce by across the widening wake of a huge liner. A veil of spray blew softly toward him. Greedily he awaited the familiar reassurance of

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its bitter scent. But when it came, it was not quite what he had expected.

He frowned out at the water. No, it was not at all the same.

That winter Goforth became ill for the first time in years. It was influenza, and not a serious case, but the convalescent period stretched on and on, and before he was well enough to do any work, it was spring.

His troubles dated from that illness, he decided; not business troubles, for he had a fine executive staff, and the company did not suffer. The troubles were within himself.

First, he went through a mild depression (the doctors had of course cautioned him of this as an after-effect), and then an uncharacteristic lassitude, broken by intermittent self-doubts. He noted, for example, that his executive vice-president was doing a good job of filling in the presidency—and then subsequently realized that this fact had no particular meaning for him. He became uneasy. He should have felt impatient to get back in harness, to show them that old Goforth still was on top.

But he had felt no emotion. It was this that disturbed him. Was it simply a delayed result of illness, or was it some inevitable process of aging which the illness had accelerated?

He tested himself grimly. He made an analysis of a stock program proposal worked out by one of the economists. He did a masterly job; he knew it himself, with a rush of familiar pride. In its way, his study was as good as anything he had ever done. No, he was not growing feeble—not yet. The malaise that possessed him was something else, undoubtedly not permanent.

That summer he spent with his family at their place on the shore. He did not feel up to sailing; he watched others sail as he lay on the beach, and was again mildly surprised by his reaction. He did not envy them at all.

In the fall he was back at his desk, in full charge once more. But he was careful to follow the advice of the doctors and the urgings of his wife, and kept his schedule light. He avoided the rush-hour trains by going to work late and leaving early, and two or three times a month he remained at home, resting.

He knew that he once would have chafed impatiently at such a regimen, but now he thought it sensible and had no sensation of loss. As always, he passed the routine problems down to his staff; but now, it seemed, so many things appeared routine that there was not much left on his desk.

The shock came late in winter, when he realized that he had actually turned over to his staff a question of vital importance. It had been well-handled, true enough,

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and he had kept in touch with its progress, but he should have attended to it personally. Why hadn't he? Was he going through some kind of metamorphosis that would end by his becoming a semiactive Chairman of the Board? Perhaps he should consider early retirement . . .

It was in his new condition of uncertainty that he had another encounter with Marshall, this time at a private university club to which they both belonged. Marshall offered to stand him a drink, and commented that he seemed to have recovered splendidly from his illness.

Goforth glanced at him, suspecting irony. He felt fully Marshall's age now, and looked, he thought, even older. But he accepted the drink, and they began to talk.

As they chatted, it occurred to him that he had nothing to lose by speaking frankly of his present perplexities. Marshall *was* older, in point of fact; possibly the man could offer some advice.

And so Goforth spoke of his illness, his slow convalescence, his disinclination to resume his old working pace, even his unthinkable transfer of responsibility to his staff —and strangest of all, his own feeling that it did not really matter, none of it.

Marshall listened attentively, nodding his head in quiet understanding, as if he had heard scores of similar accounts.

At length Goforth's voice trailed off. He glanced at Marshall in mild embarrassment.

"So," said Marshall calmly, "you don't find business life so exciting any more?"

Goforth stirred in irritation at this echo of their previous conversation. "No," he replied, shortly.

Marshall gave him a sharp, amused look. He seemed almost triumphant, and Goforth was sorry he had spoken at all.

Then Marshall leaned forward and said, "What would you say to an invitation to join the Sailing Club?"

Goforth stared at him. "Are you serious?"

"Quite so."

It was Goforth's turn to be amused. "You know, if you'd suggested this two years ago, I'd have jumped at the chance. But now—"

"Yes?" Marshall seemed not at all taken aback.

"But now, it seems of little importance. No offense, mind you."

"I completely understand."

"To put it with absolute frankness, I don't honestly care."

Marshall smiled. "Excellent!" he declared. "That's precisely what makes you eligible!" He winked at Goforth in a conspiratorial way. "We're all of that frame of mind, my friend. We're all suffering from that same disease—"

"But I'm well now."

Marshall chuckled. "So the doctors may say. But you know other-

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wise, eh?" He laughed. "The only cure, my friend, is to cast your lot with fellow-sufferers—the Sailing Club!"

He continued with the same heartiness to speak of the Club. Most of it Goforth already had heard. There were sixteen members, enough to provide the entire crew for the Club's schooner during its annual summer cruise. One of the sixteen had recently died, and Goforth would be nominated immediately to fill the vacancy; one word of assent from him would be enough to assure his election.

Goforth listened politely; but he had reservations. Marshall did not say exactly what the Club did on its cruises, and Goforth moodily assumed it was not worth mentioning. Probably the members simply drank too much and sang old college songs—hardly an enviable prospect.

Marshall interrupted his musing. "I promise you one thing," he said, more seriously. "You won't be bored."

There was a peculiar intensity in the way he spoke; Goforth wondered at it, then gave up and shrugged. Why not? He sighed and smiled. "All right. Of course. I'm honored, Marshall."

The cruise was scheduled to begin on the last day of July. The evening before, Goforth was driven by Marshall far out along the shore to the estate of another member, who kept the schooner at his private dock. By the time they arrived, all the others were there, and Goforth was duly introduced as the new crewman.

He knew them already, either as acquaintances or by reputation. They included men so eminent that they were better known than the companies or banking houses they headed. There were a few less prominent, but none below Goforth's own rank, and certainly none was in any sense obscure. He was glad to note that all of them had fought their way through the hard competitive years, just as he had done, and then in the course of the evening he slowly came to realize a further fact—that not one of these men had achieved any major triumph in recent years.

He took some comfort from this. If he had fallen into a strange lassitude, then so perhaps had they. Marshall had evidently been right. He was among "fellow-sufferers." This thought cheered him, and he moved more easily from group to group, chatting with as much self-possession as if he had been a member of the Club for years.

He had already been told that the ship was in full readiness and that the group was to sail before dawn, and so he was not surprised when the host, a gigantic old man named Teacher, suggested at nine o'clock that they all retire.

"Has the new member signed on?" someone inquired.

"Not yet," said Teacher. He

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beckoned to Goforth with one huge hairless hand. "This way, my friend," he said.

He led Goforth into an adjoining room, with several of the others following, and after unlocking a wall safe, withdrew a large black volume so worn with age that bits of the binding flaked off in his fingers.

He laid it on a table, thumbed through its pages, and at length called Goforth over and handed him a pen. Goforth noticed the old man had covered the top portion of the page with a blank sheet of paper; all that showed beneath were signatures, those of the other members.

"Sign the articles, seaman," said Teacher gruffly, in imitation of an old-time sea captain.

Goforth grinned and bent over the page, although at the same time he felt a constitutional reluctance to sign something he could not first examine. He glanced at the faces surrounding him. A voice in the background said, "You can read the whole thing, if you like—after the cruise."

There was nothing to do but sign, so he signed boldly, with a flourish, and then turned to shake the hands thrust out to him. "Well done!" someone exclaimed. They all crowded around then to initial his signature as witnesses, and Teacher insisted that they toast the new member with brandy, which they did cheerfully enough, and then went off to bed.

Goforth told himself that the ceremony had been a juvenile bit of foolishness, but somehow it had warmed him with the feeling of fellowship.

His sense of well-being persisted the next morning when in the predawn darkness he was awakened and hurriedly got dressed to join the others for breakfast.

It was still dark when they went down to the ship, each man carrying his sea bag. As he climbed aboard, Goforth was just able to make out the name painted in white letters on the bow: *Freedom IV*.

Since he was experienced, he was assigned a deck hand's job, and as he worked alongside the others to ready sails for hoisting, he sensed a marked change in their attitude.

The Club had its reputation for being casual, and certainly the night before, the members had seemed relaxed to the point of indolence; but there was a difference now. Each man carried out his tasks swiftly, in dead seriousness and without wasted motion, so that in a short time the *Freedom IV* was skimming eastward along the Sound toward the heart of the red rising sun.

Goforth was surprised and pleased. There was seamanship and discipline and sober purpose on this ship, and he gladly discarded his earlier notion that they would wallow about with no program beyond liquor and cards.

With satisfaction, he made a leisurely tour of the ship. Everything was smart and sharp, on deck

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and below, in the sleeping quarters and galley. Teacher, who seemed to be the captain, had a small cabin forward and it, too, was a model of neatness.

Goforth poked his head inside to admire it further. Teacher was not there, but in a moment the old man stepped through a narrow door on the opposite bulkhead, leading to some compartment below, followed by two other members. They greeted Goforth pleasantly, but closed and locked the door behind them, and did not offer to show him the compartment. He, for his part, refrained from asking, but later in the day he inspected the deck above it and saw that what had seemed earlier to be merely a somewhat unorthodox arrangement of criss-cross deck planking was actually a hatchway, cleverly concealed.

He crouched and ran his fingers along the hidden edges of the hatch, then glanced up guiltily to meet Marshall's eyes. Marshall seemed amused, but all he said was, "Ready for chow?"

In the next few days Goforth occasionally wondered what the forward compartment contained. Then he all but forgot about it, for his enjoyment of the voyage was too deep-felt to permit even the smallest question to trouble him. He was more content now than he had been in many months. It was not because he was sailing again, but rather, he believed, because he was actively sharing with others like himself a vigorous and demanding experience. It seemed, indeed, that they formed a little corporation there on the *Freedom IV*—and what a corporation! Even the member who occupied the lowly post of cook's helper was a man accustomed to deal in terms of millions.

Yes, what a crew it was! Now Goforth began to understand the suppressed excitement he had long ago detected as a subtle mark identifying members of the Sailing Club. Theirs was no ordinary cruise, but a grand exercise of seamanship, as if they had decided to pit their collective will against the force and cunning of the ocean, to retrieve through a challenge to that most brutal of antagonists the sense of daring which they once had found in their work . . .

They were searching for something. For a week they sailed a zigzag course, always out of sight of land, but Goforth had not the faintest notion of their whereabouts, nor did he judge that it would be proper for him to inquire. Were they pursuing a storm to provide them with some ultimate test with the sea? He could not be sure. And yet he was quite willing to wait, for there was happiness enough in each waking moment aboard the *Freedom IV*.

On the eighth day he perceived an abrupt change. There was an almost tangible mood of expectancy among the members, a quickening

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of pace and movement, a tightening of smiles and laughter that reminded him oddly of the atmosphere in a corporation board room, when the final crisis of some serious negotiation approaches. He guessed that some word had been passed among the crew, save for himself, the neophyte.

The men were tense, but it was the invigorating tensity of trained athletes waiting in confidence for a test worthy of their skills. The mood was infectious; without having any idea of what lay ahead, Goforth began to share the exhilaration and to scan the horizon eagerly.

For what? He did not care now. Whatever it might be, he felt an elemental stirring of pride and strength and knew that he would meet whatever ultimate trial impended with all the nerve and daring that his life had stamped into his being.

The *Freedom IV* changed course and plunged due east toward a haze that lay beneath heavier clouds. Goforth thought perhaps the storm lay that way and keenly watched for its signs. There were none, but he took some heart at the sight of another yacht coming toward them, and hopefully imagined that it was retreating from the combat which the *Freedom IV* seemed so ardently to seek.

He studied the sky. The clouds drifted aimlessly, then broke apart for a moment to disclose a regular expanse of blue. He sighed as he saw it, and glanced around at the other crewmen to share his feeling of frustration.

But there was no disappointment on those faces. Instead, the mood of tension seemed heightened to an almost unbearable degree. The men stood strained and stiff, their features set rigidly, their eyes quick and piercing as they stared across the water.

Goforth searched their faces desperately for comprehension, and as it slowly came to him—when at last he *knew*—he felt the revelation grip him physically with a wild penetrating excitement.

He *knew*, and so he watched with fierce absorption but without surprise as the forward hatch swung open to permit what was below to rise to the surface of the deck, and watched still more intently as the crew leaped smartly forward to prepare it with the speed born of long hours of practice.

He stood aside then, for he knew he would need training; too, before he could learn his part; but after the first shot from the sleek little cannon had smashed a great hole in the side of the other yacht, he sprang forward as readily as the others to seize the rifles which were being passed around. And as the *Freedom IV* swooped swiftly in toward the floundering survivors, his cries of delight were mixed with those of his comrades, and their weapons cracked out sharply, gaily, across the wild echoing sea.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	ROBERT TWOHY
TITLE:	*Routine Investigation*
TYPE:	Policeman's Lot
OFFICER:	Homer Crump
LOCALE:	United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*An offbeat and oddball story—no, rather an offball and oddbeat story—no, rather a mystery of the absurd—like the theater of the same phrase . . .*

AT 7:55 ON A PLEASANT APRIL morning, Officer Homer Crump pulled the police car up in front of a neat little one-story frame house that stood by itself between two weed-infested vacant lots in a suburban part of the city.

His solid policeman's stride took him up the gravel path to the door, which opened as he reached for the bell.

A billowy woman of about 50, with fluffy white hair that stood up around her head in little peaks, like meringue, was standing there. A man's bathrobe, navy-blue, was draped loosely around her.

He said, "Mrs. Park?"

"Please come in. Can I pour you some bourbon?"

"Bourbon?"

"Perhaps you prefer gin."

"Nothing, thanks." He shook his head slightly. He felt a little bewildered. He wasn't used to being plied with offers of liquor when he went out to investigate a death—certainly not at 8:00 o'clock in the morning.

He said briskly, "You reported on the phone that your husband, um, died during the night?"

"Yes."

"If you'd please show me the body . . ."

Mrs. Park picked up a glass from a table. The liquid in the glass was the color of rich oak.

"He's in the bedroom."

She turned to lead him, and he

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saw, across the back of the bathrobe, in large white letters, *S.S. Silver Queen.*

Officer Crump had a sudden feeling that this might develop into something more than a routine investigation.

Mrs. Park allowed him to step past her into the bedroom, waved the glass toward the bed, and announced, "My husband."

Crump, who was fairly young, and a decent, ordinary man, stood there and looked at what lay on the bed.

Mrs. Park took a sip of her drink. "His name," she said, "was Lloyd."

Crump said finally, "This is a joke, isn't it?"

"A joke? Oh, no, he's not pretending. I shook him and shook him."

Crump said in a slow, careful voice, "What are you trying to do, Mrs. Park?"

"Oh, dear. Have I done something wrong? I thought the police were supposed to be notified when there was sudden death."

Crump took his eyes away from what lay on the bed. He turned and went back into the living room.

She followed him. "Are you sure you won't have some bourbon? Or gin?"

He shook his head.

She reached into a cupboard next to the fireplace and brought out a bottle. She poured four inches into the glass. After replacing the bottle, she cradled the glass in both hands and smiled at it. She said, "Lloyd loved his bourbon so."

"Did he?" said Crump.

"Yes. He had a wonderful relationship with bourbon."

"A wonderful *relationship?*"

"Yes. He was a very sensitive man—capable of deep attachments. He loved Rimsky-Korsakov too."

"Rimsky-Korsakov and bourbon."

"Yes, his life was a full one. And then there was the *Silver Queen.*" She shook her head gently, and smiled. "How he loved that beautiful boat of ours!"

Crump watched her as she sipped the bourbon. He couldn't think, for the moment, of anything to say.

She nodded toward a leather chair in a corner of the room. "He would sit there, with Rimsky-Korsakov going on the record player, his glass in his hand and the bottle between his feet, and talk by the hour about our boat . . . . How he would talk!"

"Rimsky-Korsakov, bourbon, and the *Silver Queen.*" Crump nodded. He gave a small smile. "Well, Mrs. Park, it's a good routine. I guess you're an old vaudevillian or something . . . I mean, it's very good. But now we've had our little joke, and let's not beat it to death, all right?"

She smiled vaguely, and said, "I don't really understand."

"What I mean is, you've got a skeleton dressed in green silk pajamas on that bed in there, and it's quite a hair-raiser. But what's the

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point? Do you mind letting me in on the point?"

"I don't really understand. I mean, I telephoned . . . shouldn't I have telephoned? I thought you would know what to do."

"Not when it's a skeleton," Crump said. "Not when it's a skeleton in green pajamas."

"Lloyd *was* thin," said Mrs. Park. "He had this wonderful thing with bourbon, you know, and he felt that he really couldn't afford to spend money on food. He always tried to be practical about money matters. And, of course, we were saving to buy the *Silver Queen*."

"To buy it? I thought you said you owned it."

"Oh, no. We didn't own it. But one day we were *going* to own it and just sail away, sail around the world, and never come into port, never come into port at all." She smiled into the glass she held in her hands. "He loved that boat, he really did." Her voice was soft. "He said it was the most beautiful boat in the world."

Crump took a deep breath, then let it out slowly. He said, "Who owns the boat?"

"The *Silver Queen*? I really don't know. But one day we were going to buy it, if there really was such a boat, and if we could find it."

Crump had a sudden feeling that if he went to the bedroom door and peeked in, the skeleton would be gone. And everything would be all right. And then he could proceed in officer-like fashion, knowing what routine to follow, dealing with a woman who drank too much and wasn't quite right in the head.

So he went to the bedroom door. And peeked in. And the hollow eyes stared at him, and the teeth grinned at him like tiny tombstones.

He turned back and wiped his hand over his face. He said, "It's quite a routine. Tell me, Mrs. Park, is that a *real* skeleton, or is it some kind of plastic job from a novelty store?"

She was looking into her glass. She said tenderly, "I do hope they have bourbon for him . . . on the other side."

The doorbell rang suddenly. Mrs. Park said, "Oh, that must be Marble. I phoned her."

"Marble?" said Crump.

A girl about eighteen, with glasses, a pale small face, and straight black hair, entered.

Mrs. Park said, "Marble, this nice young man is an official from the police. And this is my niece, Marble."

"How do you do," said Crump.

"Marble is a student of science at the university." Mrs. Park smiled at the girl. "She's getting along famously. Aren't you, Marble?"

"Yes. Straight A's. Excuse me, I'll go look at Uncle Lloyd."

Crump waited, taking deep breaths. In a few moments the girl came back. She said, "It's too bad, Aunt. But he does look as if he went peacefully."

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She started for the door. Crump said in a hoarse voice, "Young lady."

"Her name is Marble," said Mrs. Park.

"I know it is. Listen—do you know what's on that bed?"

She stared at him. Behind the thick glasses her eyes swam like pale yellow fish.

"Of course. Uncle Lloyd."

"There's a *skeleton* in that bed, young lady!"

"Her name is Marble," said Mrs. Park.

"Damn it, all right! Marble!"

Marble said sharply, "Please don't swear. My aunt is not accustomed to vulgar language."

"It's all right, dear." Mrs. Park smiled at Crump. "The young man is only trying to do his duty."

"Doing his duty doesn't have to include vulgar language, Aunt."

"They teach them such a lot of things at the university," said Mrs. Park. She smiled at Crump.

Crump passed his hand over his face, from hairline to chin. "I," he said, "am going to . . ." He stopped, because he didn't really know what he was going to do.

Marble said, staring at him, "What's the matter?"

"I don't think he's used to the sight of death," said Mrs. Park. "Have you seen death before, young man?"

"I have. I've seen people with bullet holes, knife wounds, I've seen them pulled out of smashed cars, burned-down buildings, sewers, lakes, machinery, but there's one thing I've never seen, no. I've never seen a skeleton dressed in green silk pajamas. Where'd you *get* that thing in there, Mrs. Park?"

Marble said, "I don't understand you. I don't understand you at all."

Crump said, "Young lady . . ." He stopped, turned, and took a few steps, breathing deeply. Then he turned back. "You're a student of science, you say? All right, answer me this—where did the skin go?"

"The skin?"

"I don't know what I'm saying." Crump rubbed his temples hard. "What am I arguing for? You two are 'way ahead of me. 'Way ahead. I'd never catch up. All right, I surrender. What's the gag? Is there really a Lloyd? I mean, do you really have a husband, Mrs. Park?"

Marble said, "Are you feeling all right, Officer?"

"I think he needs a drink," said Mrs. Park. "Wouldn't you let me pour you some bourbon? Or gin?"

"She doesn't *have* a husband," Marble said. She spoke very clearly and distinctly. "She *had* a husband. Her husband is lying in there."

"Perhaps he wonders if I had another husband before Lloyd," said Mrs. Park. "No, there was only Lloyd. We had twenty-eight wonderful years together."

"Did he eat at all?" asked Crump. "Did he go all the twenty-eight years without eating at all?"

"No, he used to eat. Until he

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realized how much money he was throwing away. Just on food. And then came the wonderful dream of the *Silver Queen* . . ."

"By that time he had developed his beautiful relationship with bourbon?" Crump asked warily.

"Yes." She stared at the glass in her hand, with a loving smile.

Crump said, "I'm going. I can't arrest you because I don't know what you've done—except make a mockery of the law, which I can't prove until I get some people from the Department down here. Maybe you really believe that skeleton in there. Maybe it *is* somebody who used to be named Lloyd. Maybe you carry him around with you in a trunk. Maybe he's been dead for years. Maybe he was murdered a long time ago. Maybe I'm in the middle of something by Tennessee Williams. *I* don't know. But I'll tell you this: I'm going to find out."

Mrs. Park said, "Do you know, it's peculiar you should mention that."

"What? What did I mention?"

"Mr. Williams. Actually Lloyd *did* come originally from the South, though—I'm sure they never met."

Crump said hoarsely, "I am going to come back. And don't try any hanky-panky with that—that thing in there. Don't try to hide it. If you do, I'll tear this place apart. Just remember."

"I wish," Marble said crisply, "that you would not speak of Uncle Lloyd as a *thing*. He's gone now, but he was a human being, just like yourself."

Mrs. Park said, with a smile at Crump, "They teach them so much at the university."

Crump said, "I'll be back in twenty minutes. With other people. And maybe with a couple of strait jackets."

He walked to the door. His hand was on the knob and he was just about to turn it when he heard a hollow cough behind him. It sounded oddly echoing—as if it had come from a cave.

He heard two sharp cries—one from Mrs. Park, the other from Marble.

"Lloyd!"

"Uncle Lloyd!"

The cough sounded again. Somehow there seemed to be, under its hollow tones, a strain of the old South . . . if there could be such a thing as a cough with a Southern accent.

Marble's voice said, "But we thought you were dead!"

He heard Mrs. Park's voice say, "Dear, you frightened us so . . . Marble, dear, get him his glass. I was positive . . . How could you sleep so deeply? I prodded you and prodded you . . ."

Crump stood there, very still, his hand on the doorknob. He said to himself, I don't have to turn around. I can walk out and go back to the station and make a routine report, closing the case, and that will be the end of it. And gradually it

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will all fuzz together, the way a dream does, and I won't be sure after a while that any of it really happened at all. Mrs. Park and Lloyd and Marble and the *Silver Queen* . . .

He shook his head vigorously. The thing was, they were two mad women—mad as hatters. And a hollow cough could be imagined. And all he had to do was turn around—to prove beyond doubt they were mad.

But if he didn't turn around, it would mean that their madness had infected him.

So he turned around.

And wished he hadn't.

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a new story by **WILLIAM IRISH**

PETIT GUIGNOL: I

A memorable little chiller that may go on and on in your head like a broken record . . .

STEPS . . . COMING NEAR

by WILLIAM IRISH

CEIL HAD BROUGHT HER LATEST love home with her. Ceil is my daughter. She is always bringing her latest love home with her. At least once a week, sometimes twice in the same week, she brings a new and different latest love home with her, and the one before is neglected, forgotten, discarded. Fickle? Well, aren't they all at her age? But while the newest latest love holds sway over her, she gives herself to it heart and soul. There is no holding back. There are posturings, and the rapturous clasping-together of the hands alongside her own cheek; there is a light in her eyes of starry radiance, there are sighs of unutterable bliss. I have even seen her kneel in adoration in the center of the room hugging her arms about herself. I have even heard her squeal in unconfined delight.

These loves of hers are not boys or young men, you understand. Ceil is not old enough yet for a serious love affair. She dances with boys, she goes out with groups of boys and girls to the beach, or for a car ride, but these boys are still no more than companions, friends, nothing else.

No, the loves I speak of are flat and round, about the diameter of a dinner plate, and black, and polished as jet. She comes home with them tucked under her arm, and fits them over the turntable of the high fidelity machine, and flicks a little switch. And then the love affair begins, there in our presence, right in the center of the family living-room.

I saw her slip a new record out of its paper jacket, and I knew we were in for it once again.

"What, another one?" I said, putting on an air of long-suffering patience that was only partly pretended.

"Oh, but this is dreamy. This is the end."

When she says it is the end, she does not mean there will be no more. I learned that to my vast disappointment long ago. The first time I heard it my hopes rose high,

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only to be dashed down to earth again. She had only meant it was better than the one before. Seven short days later there was another one, still better than the one better than the one before.

"The Prince," she whispered. "The Prince." This is an aristocracy that the Almanach de Gotha never knew. The aristocracy of jazz. There was a King—Mr. Nat Cole. There was a Duke—Mr. Ellington. There was a Count—Mr. Basie. But that was long ago—almost a whole year perhaps, or was it a year and a half? Now it was the Prince—Mr. Matt Molloy.

The sounds began.

"He's so cool," she said, drawing up her knees under her chin and wrapping her arms about them.

This, I had learned by now, did not refer to the performer's bodily temperature.

"He's out of this world," she said.

For my part, I could only wish he was.

"I get his message," she said.

Her mother looked up, meaning only to assume a fond maternal interest in her almost-grown daughter's affairs. "Oh," she said benevolently, "I didn't know you had corresponded with him. What was in the message? What did it say?"

"Oh, Mama," protested Ceil with a reproachful expression.

She turned to me complainingly. "Papa, please tell Mama to stop making fun of me."

Her innocent mother shrugged bewilderedly. "In my day a message meant a note or a letter or a telegram."

"It doesn't now," I informed her drily.

The commotion—excuse me, the song interpretation—was growing louder.

"That reminds me," my wife said, rising. "I must go upstairs and sort the laundry."

"Coward," I whispered to her out of the side of my mouth.

She gave me a knowing look that said plainly, You are the coward, not me. You are aching to get out of here with me, but you haven't got the courage to leave.

So Ceil and I and the Prince were left alone.

I think I heard him through seven times that first evening. To have kept actual count would be, it seems to me, an act of disloyalty on the part of a doting father toward his young daughter. So I content myself by saying I heard him far too many times. Six and one half times too many, or even six and three-quarters. But one should be willing to suffer for the sake of one's dear ones. I am, and I did.

However, a law of diminishing returns invariably sets in during the course of these love affairs of Ceil's. I knew this by experience. If, for example, one listens to her current rage seven times on the first occasion, it is a safe bet that three or four evenings later he will

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be heard not more than twice. And perhaps a week later, not at all. Of course, by that time one is due for a new one, so I am not sure there is too much advantage in it.

About a week after she first brought Mr. Molloy home with her, she came into the room, kissed me (I had only just arrived home myself), and then as soon as our brief but affectionate exchanges of the day were over, she proceeded to put him back on the turntable and finger the switch. At that moment, before it could be drowned out by the imminent clamor, the telephone rang. Her mother was in the kitchen supervising the evening meal, so Ceil called out to her, "Never mind, Mama, I'll get it for you," and ran out of the room.

Now, my mind is a curious one. If it is subjected to a certain pattern or sequence long enough, it memorizes it—even if the pattern is completely on the margin of its attention, outside its main interests at the time. It is a sort of automatic process. I think many other people's minds work that way too.

I remember glancing up at one point from the office reports I was going over, with a vague feeling of dissatisfaction about some minor detail that was just beyond my awareness, but I couldn't quite recognize what it was, or had been. So I went back to the reports again.

By the time Ceil returned, the record had already come to a stop. She made no move to start it again; Mr. Malloy was already at a very low ebb in her affections.

I looked up, and for a moment I couldn't recall what it was that had disturbed me the first time. Then it suddenly came to me and I turned to her. "Ceil," I said, "how should the bridge of that piece go?"

This is an expression I had learned from Ceil herself. The middle part of a song is called the bridge. Ceil did not know why; therefore I still do not know why either. I suppose because it links the first part to the last part, bridges them over.

She attempted at first to reproduce the succession of tonal sounds —an impossibility except for a slowly strangling gorilla.

"No," I said. "I mean the words, not the notes."

She began to tell the words off on the tips of her fingers, turning her eyes upward as an aid to memory. For when love wanes, all the little remembered things about it are apt to fade with it.

"*Waiting for you in the moonlight,*
My heart beats with a lover's delight.
Are these your steps I hear,
Steps so dear, coming near?"

"You see?" I exclaimed, sitting up more alertly. "That is exactly what I told myself they should be. But they aren't that way on the record. That's what caught my ear."

"Oh, Papa," she said patronizingly, "you probably weren't paying close attention. You have all those office reports there, and—"

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"I beg your pardon," I said a little stiffly. "My mind is trained to be precise. My whole occupation depends on hairline precision. Well, listen for yourself then."

We played it over, bending forward attentively.

When the bridge came, Prince Molloy sang the first three lines just as Ceil had recited them to me. "*Waiting for you in the moonlight, My heart beats with a lover's delight. Are these your steps I hear . . .* Then he groaned—well, his entire singing style was one prolonged groan anyway, so I should say he groaned more deeply, more realistically than usual, and this came out: "*Oh-h-h, I'm sick, oh-h-h, I'm dying . . .*"

She was a little surprised, but not too concerned. "Well," she said, "it only proves how mistaken you can be even after you hear a thing over and—"

"No, you miss the point," I insisted. "If I had said it was one variation, and you another, very well then. But we both hit on exactly the same new fourth line. Identical, word for word. How do you explain that?"

She put a bent knuckle to her mouth and nibbled on it thoughtfully. "I don't know, Papa. It *is* strange, isn't it?"

"I must get to the bottom of this," I said determinedly, putting aside my office reports. "It will keep bothering me until I do. Logic demands a logical explanation."

"Suppose I call up one of the girls I know and ask her," Ceil suggested. "Most of them have this same record in their houses." And without waiting for me to agree, she ran outside to the telephone.

When she returned, she reported, "Virginia said exactly same thing we both did at first—the four lines just as we first thought they were. She even played her record to make sure, while I waited, and then she came back and said it was the original way—the fourth line going *Steps so dear, coming near . . .* Not *sick . . . dying.*"

"Then there must be two different records, don't you think? Maybe ours is a faulty one and it slipped into circulation by mistake."

She has great lore in these branches of culture, greater than I have. "It couldn't be, Papa, just couldn't. They're all made from a master record. They're all stamped from that master, whether ten are sold or ten thousand or a million. Two different things *can't* be on there. It's got to be one or the other."

"Wait," I said firmly, digging into my pocket and giving her some money. "There is only one way to settle it, once and for all. Go back to the music store where you bought it, and buy another, a duplicate."

"But how will that prove—?" she started to object. Then she did as I told her.

"And when you pass the news-

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stand, see if the evening paper is out, like a good girl," I called after her. "It hadn't arrived yet when I went by."

She took excessively long, I thought, for such a simple errand, and when she returned at last, the white and somewhat dazed look on her face brought me to my feet in alarm. "What happened? Were you hit by a car or something?"

"No—no—nothing like that," she said dully, as though her thoughts were far off. "I played it in the store first, before I bought it, and listened closely," she went on in a languid voice. "It was the way we thought ours was in the beginning. The same."

"Well, where is it, then?"

"I dropped it in the street, Papa," she answered.

"But I thought nowadays they made them of some unbreakable material, so that—"

"I didn't want to bring it home with me," was all she said, falteringly. Then she added, "Here's your paper, Papa."

I took it and glanced only carelessly at it for an instant. Then I quickly looked back again, more closely this time.

In one of the upper corners of the front page was a last-minute bulletin that read: "It has just been announced that Matt 'Prince' Molloy, known to millions of people all over the world, has died suddenly at Calvary Hospital within the last hour. No further details are available at the moment—"

I saw Ceil seek a chair and drop into it, the way even the young do when they feel unable to support themselves standing any longer. "We both heard it," she said softly, as if to herself. "But no one will ever believe us."

Then she looked at me. And she said again and again, "But we both heard it, we both heard it . . ."

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a new story by ***HENRY SLESAR***

PETIT GUIGNOL: II

Another memorable little chiller — about a horse racing bet and a threatening letter . . .

FEDERAL OFFENSE

by HENRY SLESAR

PHIL BURNS, A WALKING CATALOGUE of grievances against his wife, didn't learn of her latest offense until he incurred the wrath of Joe Cleveland. Cleveland was a graven-faced bookie who worked out of Rip's Barber Shop on Superior Avenue in, of course, Cleveland, Ohio. Office business took Phil to that city on the average of twice a month, and he had been dealing with the bookmaker for well over a year without friction on either side. Now, however, he had placed a larger than usual bet, lost, and neglected to pay. Cleveland wrote Burns a letter.

"'Dear Mr. Burns,' Louise quoted bitterly. 'Last time you was here you didn't pay up the two hundred. Please remit.'"

"You opened my mail," Phil said angrily. "That letter was addressed to me and you opened it!"

"So what?" Louise said.

"What do you mean, so what? You know that's a Federal offense, opening other people's mail?"

"So turn me over to J. Edgar Hoover, why don't you?"

"How long you been doing this? Reading my mail?"

"Listen," Louise rasped, "around this joint you gotta protect yourself at all times. If I didn't read that letter you could have given me some phony story about needing an engine overhaul or something—"

She had cited Grievance Number One. Phil's wife had her own money, a trust account from her father, and Phil had been drawing on it from Day One of their marriage.

"Don't worry," he said. "Don't worry, I wasn't going to ask you for a nickel."

He slammed out of the house and went to see his pal Mort.

"Lend me some dough for a couple of days, Mort, huh?"

"Are you kidding? You're into me for fifty already."

At the office he saw old Sakolsky, the treasurer.

"Sorry, Phil, you know the company rules. You've already had

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three advances, and that's the limit."

That night he leaned over Louise's shoulder at her vanity table and said, "Aw, come on, honey, let's not fight. Just give me the two hundred bucks and it'll be the last time. I promise."

"Yeah, sure," she said dryly, and sprayed the surroundings with hair fixative. Phil coughed and went to bed.

On the train to Cleveland he got an idea. He went to Rip's Barber Shop and had a haircut while waiting for Joe.

When the bookie arrived, Phil said, "Listen, Joe, can you give me one more week? I guarantee to raise the money in a week."

"All right," Joe said wearily.

In the hotel Phil sat down with a blank sheet of stationery, and in block letters he wrote a letter to himself:

PHIL: IF YOU DON'T PAY UP THE TWO HUNDRED IN FORTY-EIGHT HOURS YOU'RE A DEAD MAN. THIS IS YOUR LAST WARNING.

He left the note unsigned. Then he addressed an envelope to his home address, and put the letter in the mail.

Three days later he went back East and chuckled all the way, just thinking of that anonymous letter. Thinking of Louise's reaction when she opened it. He envisioned a scen full of tears and recriminations, bu it was bound to end happily. Mone in his hand. Maybe he wouldn' pay Joe back right away. There wa a horse running at Aqueduct tha had once paid him twenty-four fo two . . .

He walked into the apartmen and called out, "Louise?"

She came out of the bedroom filing her nails.

"I'm home," he said.

"Yeah, I noticed."

"Any mail for me?"

"Nothing much. It's on the kitchen table."

He went into the kitchen anc riffled through the stack. There was a gas bill, a phone bill, fou pieces of junk mail, and a post carc from his sister.

"Is this all?" he said.

"Yeah, that's all."

"It couldn't be. I been gone fou days."

"That's *all*," Louise said positively. "Nothing else. Absolutely nothing at all."

She went back into the bedroom leaving him to get his own supper He went to bed an hour later, stil unable to understand what had happened to the anonymous letter he had sent.

He woke up in the middle of the night, sweating, when he finally understood . . .

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***a NEW story by* AVRAM DAVIDSON**

Mr. Davidson can write with great charm—and bite; with remarkable authenticity—and lovingkindness. Indeed, his work can truly be called sui generis*—individual, personal, sometimes even unique. Who else could have imparted the flavor, the flourish, the fluorescence to the story you are about to read in quite the way that Avram Davidson has done it?*

THE COBBLESTONES OF SARATOGA STREET

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

COBBLESTONES TO GO SAID THE headline. Miss Louisa lifted her eyebrows, lifted her quizzing-glass (probably the last one in actual use anywhere in the world), read the article, passed it to her sister. Miss Augusta read it without eyeglass or change of countenance, and handed it back.

"They shan't," she said.

They glanced at a faded photograph in a silver frame on the mantelpiece, then at each other. Miss Louisa placed the newspaper next to the pewter chocolate-pot, tinkled a tiny bell. After a moment a white-haired colored man entered the room.

"Carruthers," said Miss Augusta, "you may clear away breakfast."

"Well, *I* think it is outrageous," Betty Linkhorn snapped.

"My dear," her grandfather said mildly, "you can't stop progress." He sipped his tea.

"Progress my eye! This is the only decently paved street in the whole town—you know that, don't you, papa? Just because it's cobblestone and not concrete—or macadam—or—"

"My dear," said Edward Linkhorn, "*I* remember when several of the streets were still paved with wood. I remember it quite particularly because, in defiance of my father's orders, I went barefoot one fine summer's day and got a splinter in my heel. My mother took it out with a needle and my father thrashed me . . . Besides, don't you find the cobblestones difficult to manage in high-heeled shoes?"

Betty smiled—not sweetly. "I don't find them difficult at all. Mrs. Harris does—but, then, if *she'd* been thrashed for going barefoot . . .

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Come on, Papa," she said, while her grandfather maintained a diplomatic silence, "admit it—if Mrs. Harris hadn't sprained her ankle, if her husband wasn't a paving contractor, if his partner wasn't C. B. Smith, the state chairman of the party that's had the city, county *and* state sewn up for twenty years—"

Mr. Linkhorn spread honey on a small piece of toast. " 'If wishes were horses, beggars would ride—' "

"Well, what's wrong with that?"

" '—and all mankind be consumed with pride.' My dear, I will see what I can do."

His Honor was interviewing the press. "Awright, what's next? New terlets in the jail, right? Awright, if them bums and smokies wouldn't of committed no crimes they wouldn't be in no jail, right? Awright, what's next? Cobblestones? *Cob*blestones? Damn it, *again* this business wit the cobblestones! You'd think they were diamonds or sumpthin'. Aw*right*. Well, om, look, except for Saratoga Street, the last cobblestones inna city were tore up when I was a *boy*, for Pete's sake. Allathem people there, they're living inna past, yaknowwhatimean? Allathem gas lamps in frunna the houses, huh? Hitching posts and carriage blocks, for Pete sakes! Whadda they think we're living inna horse-and-buggy age? *Awright*, they got that park with a fence around it, private property, okay. But the streets belong to the City, see? Somebody breaks a leg on wunna them cobblestones, they can *sue* the City, right? So—*cobblestones?* Up they come, anats all there is to it. Awright, what's next?"

His comments appeared in the newspaper (the publisher of which knew what side his Legal Advertisements were buttered on) in highly polished form. *I yield to no one in my respect for tradition and history, but the cobblestoned paving of Saratoga Street is simply too dangerous to be endured. The cobblestones will be replaced by a smooth, efficient surface more in keeping with the needs of the times.*

As the Mayor put it, "What's next?"

Next was a series of protests by the local, county, and state historical societies, all of which protests were buried in two-or-three-line items in the back of the newspaper. But (as the publisher put it, "After all, C.B., business is business. And, besides, it won't make any difference in the long run, anyway.") the Saratoga Street Association reprinted them in a full-page advertisement headed *PROTECT OUR HERITAGE*, and public interest began to pick up.

It was stimulated by the interest shown in the metropolitan papers, all of which circulated locally. *BLUEBLOODS MAN THE BARRICADES*, said one. *20TH CENTURY CATCHES UP WITH SARATOGA STREET*, said another. *BELOVED COBBLE-*

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STONES DOOMED, HISTORICAL SARATOGA STREET PREPARES TO SAY FAREWELL, lamented a third. And so it went.

And it also went like this: *To The Editor, Sir, I wish to point out an error in the letter which claimed that the cobblestones were laid down in 1836. True, the houses in Saratoga Street were mostly built in that year, but like many local streets it was not paved at all until late in the '90s. So the cobblestones are not so old as some people think.*

And it went like this, too:

Mr. Edward Linkhorn: Would you gentlemen care for anything else to drink?

Reporter: Very good whiskey.

Photographer: Very good.

Linkhorn: We are very gratified that a national picture magazine is giving us so much attention.

Reporter: Well, *you* know—human interest story. Not so much soda, Sam.

Photographer: Say, Mr. Linkhorn, can I ask you a question?

Linkhorn: Certainly.

Photographer: Well, I notice that on all the houses—in all the windows, I mean—they got these signs, *Save Saratoga Street Cobblestones.* All but one house. How come? They *against* the stones?

Reporter: Say, that's right, Mr. Linkhorn. How come—?

Linkhorn: Well, gentlemen, that house, number 25, belongs to the Misses de Gray.

Reporter: de Gray? de Gray?

Linkhorn: Their father was General de Gray of Civil War fame. His statue is in de Gray Square. We also have a de Gray Avenue.

Reporter: His *daughters* are still living? What are they like?

Linkhorn: I have never had the privilege of meeting them.

Miss Adelaide Tallman's family was every bit as good as any of those who lived on Saratoga Street; the Tallmans had simply never *cared* to live on Saratoga Street, that was all. The Tallman estate had been one of the sights of the city, but nothing remained of it now except the name *Jabez Tallman* on real-estate maps used in searching land titles, and the old mansion itself—much modified now, and converted into a funeral parlor. Miss Tallman herself lived in a nursing home. Excitement was rare in her life, and she had no intention of passing up any bit of attention which came her way.

"I knew the de Gray girls well," she told the lady from the news syndicate. This was a big fib; she had never laid eyes on them in her life—but who was to know? She had *heard* enough about them to talk as if she had, and if the de Gray girls didn't like it, let them come and tell her so. Snobby people, the de Grays, always were. What if her father, Mr. Tallman, *had* hired a substitute during the Rebellion? *Hmph.*

"Oh, they were the most beauti-

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ful things! Louisa was the older, she was blonde. Augusta's hair was brown. They always had plenty of beaux—not that I didn't have my share of them too, mind you," she added, looking sharply at the newspaper lady, as if daring her to deny it. "But nobody was ever good enough for *them*. There was one young man, his name was Horace White, and—oh, he was the *handsomest* thing! I danced with him myself," she said complacently, "at the Victory Ball after the Spanish War. He had gone away to be an officer in the Navy, and he was just the most handsome thing in his uniform that you ever saw. But *he* wasn't good enough for them, either. He went away after that—went out west to Chicago or some such place—and no one ever heard from him again. Jimmy Taylor courted Augusta, and William Snow and Rupert Roberts—no, Rupert was sweet on Louisa, yes, but—"

The newspaper lady asked when Miss Tallman had last seen the de Gray sisters.

Oh, said Miss Tallman vaguely, many years ago. *Many* years ago . . . (Had she really danced with anybody at the Victory Ball? Was she still wearing her hair down then? Perhaps she was thinking of the Junior Cotillion. Oh, well, who was to know?)

"About 1905," she said firmly, crossing her fingers under her blanket. "But, you see, nobody was *good* enough for them. And so, by and by, they stopped seeing *anybody*. And that's the way it was."

That was not quite the way it was. They saw Carruthers.

Carruthers left the house on Sunday mornings only—to attend at the A.M.E. Zion Church. Sunday evenings he played the harmonium while Miss Louisa and Miss Augusta sang hymns. All food was delivered and Carruthers received it either at the basement door or the rear door. The Saratoga Street Association took care of the maintenance of the outside of the house, of course; all Carruthers had to do there was sweep the walk and polish the brass.

It must not be thought that because his employers were recluses, Carruthers was one, too; or because they did not choose to communicate with the outside world, he did not choose to do so, either. If, while engaged in his chores, he saw people he knew, he would greet them. He was, in fact, the first person to greet Mrs. Henry Harris when she moved into Saratoga Street.

"Why, hel-lo, Henrietta," he said. "What in the world are *you* doing here?"

Mrs. Harris did not seem to appreciate this attention.

Carruthers read the papers, too.

"What do they want to bother them old stones for?" he asked himself. "They been here long as I can remember."

The question continued to pose

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itself. One morning he went so far as to tap the Cobblestones story in the newspaper with his finger and raise his eyebrows inquiringly.

Miss Augusta answered him. "They won't," she said.

Miss Louisa frowned. "Is all this conversation necessary?"

Carruthers went back downstairs. "That sure relieves my mind," he said to himself.

"The newspapers seem to be paying more attention to the de Gray sisters than to the cobblestones," Betty Linkhorn said.

"Well," her grandfather observed, "people *are* more important than cobblestones. Still," he went on, "*House of Mystery* seems to be pitching it a little stronger than is necessary. They just want to be left alone, that's all. And I rather incline to doubt that General M. M. de Gray won the Civil War all by himself, as these articles imply."

Betty, reading further, said *Hmmm*. "Papa, except for that poor old Miss Tallman, there doesn't seem to be anyone alive—outside of their butler—who has ever *seen* them, even." She giggled. "Do you suppose that maybe they could be *dead*? For years and *years*? And old Carruthers has them covered with wax and just dusts them every day with a feather mop?"

Mr. Linkhorn said he doubted it.

Comparisons with the Collier brothers were inevitable, and newsreel and television cameras were standing by in readiness for—well, no one knew just what. And the time for the repaving of Saratoga Street grew steadily nearer. An injunction was obtained; it expired. And then there seemed nothing more that could be done.

"It is claimed that removal would greatly upset and disturb the residents of Saratoga Street, many of whom are said to be elderly," observed the judge, denying an order of further stay; "but it is significant that the two oldest inhabitants, the daughters of General M. M. de Gray, the Hero of Chickasaw Bend, have expressed no objection whatsoever."

Betty wept. "Well, why *haven't* they?" she demanded. "Don't they realize that this is the beginning of the end for Saratoga Street? First the cobblestones, then the flagstone sidewalks, then the hitching posts and carriage blocks—then they'll tear up the common for a parking lot and knock down the three houses at the end to make it a through street. Can't you *ask* them—?"

Her grandfather spread his hands. "They never had a telephone," he said. "And to the best of my knowledge—although I've written—they haven't answered a letter for more than forty years. No, my dear, I'm afraid it's hopeless."

Said His Honor: "Nope, no change in plans. T'morra morning at eight a.m. sharp, the cobblestones *go*. Awright, what's next?"

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At eight that morning a light snow was falling. At eight that morning a crowd had gathered. Saratoga Street was only one block long. At its closed end it was only the width of three houses set in their little gardens; then it widened so as to embrace the small park—"common"—then narrowed again.

The newsreel and television cameras were at work, and several announcers described, into their microphones, the arrival of the Department of Public Works trucks at the corner of Saratoga and Trenton Streets, loaded with workmen and air hammers and pickaxes, at exactly eight o'clock.

At exactly one minute after eight the front door of number 25 Saratoga Street, at the northwest corner, swung open. The interviewers and cameramen were, for a moment, intent on the rather embarrassed crew foreman, and did not at first observe the opening of the door. Then someone shouted, "*Look!*" And then everyone noticed.

First came Carruthers, very erect, carrying a number of items which were at first not identifiable. The crowd parted for him as if he had been Moses, and the crowd, the Red Sea. First he unrolled an old, but still noticeably red, carpet. Next he unfolded and set up two campstools. Then he waited.

Out the door came Miss Louisa de Gray, followed by Miss Augusta. They moved into the now absolutely silent crowd without a word; and without a word they seated themselves on the campstools—Miss Louisa facing south, Miss Augusta facing north.

Carruthers proceeded to unfurl two banners and stood—at parade rest, so to speak—with one in each hand. The snowy wind blew out their folds, revealing them to be a United States flag with 36 stars and the banner of the Army of the Tennessee.

And while at least fifty million people watched raptly at their television sets, Miss Louisa drew her father's saber from its scabbard and placed it across her knees; and Miss Augusta, taking up her father's musket, proceeded to load it with powder and ball and drove the charge down with a ramrod.

After a while the workmen debated what they ought do. Failing to have specific instructions suitable to the new situation, they built a fire in an ashcan, and stood around it, warming their hands.

The first telegram came from the Ladies of the G.A.R.; the second, from the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Both, curiously enough, without mutual consultation, threatened a protest march on the City Hall. In short and rapid succession followed indignant messages from the Senior Citizens' Congress, the Sons of Union Veterans, the American Legion, the B'nai Brith, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the D.A.R., the N.A.A.C.P.,

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the Society of the War of 1812, the V.F.W., the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, and the Blue Star Mothers. After that it became difficult to keep track.

The snow drifted down upon them, but neither lady, nor Carruthers, moved a thirty-second of an inch.

At twenty-seven minutes after nine the Mayor's personal representative arrived on the scene—his ability to speak publicly without a script had long been regarded by the Mayor himself as something akin to sorcery.

"I have here," the personal representative declared loudly, holding up a paper, "a statement from His Honor announcing his intention to summon a special meeting of the Council for the sole purpose of turning Saratoga Street into a private street, title to be vested in the Saratoga Street Association. *Then*—" The crowd cheered, and the personal representative held up his hands for silence. "*Then*, in the event of anyone sustaining injuries because of cobblestones, the City won't be responsible."

There were scattered boos and hisses. The representative smiled broadly, expressed the Municipality's respect for Tradition, and urged the Misses de Gray to get back into their house, please, before they both caught cold.

Neither moved. The Mayor's personal representative had not reached his position of eminence for nothing. He turned to the D.P.W. crew. "Okay, boys—no work for you here. Back to the garage. In fact," he added, "take the day off!"

The crew cheered, the crowd cheered, the trucks rolled away. Miss Louisa sheathed her sword, Miss Augusta unloaded her musket by the simple expedient of firing it into the air, the Mayor's representative ducked (and was immortalized in that act by twenty cameras). The Misses de Gray then stood up. Reporters crowded in, and were ignored as if they had never been born.

Miss Louisa, carrying her sword like an admiral as the two sisters made their way back to the house, observed Betty and her grandfather in the throng. "Your features look familiar," she said. "Do they not, Augusta?"

"Indeed," said Miss Augusta. "I think he must be Willie Linkhorn's little boy—are you?" Mr. Linkhorn, who was seventy, nodded; for the moment he could think of nothing to say. "Then you had better come inside. The girl may come, too. Go home, good people," she said, pausing at the door and addressing the crowd, "and be sure to drink a quantity of hot rum and tea with nutmeg on it."

The door closed on ringing cheers from the populace.

"Carruthers, please mull us all some port," Miss Louisa directed. "I would have advised the same outside, but I am not sure the common people would *care* to drink port.

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Boy," she said, to the gray-haired Mr. Linkhorn, "would you care to know why we have broken a seclusion of sixty years and engaged in a public demonstration so foreign to our natures?"

He blinked. "Why . . . I suppose it was your attachment to the traditions of Saratoga Street, exemplified by the cobble—"

"Stuff!" said Miss Augusta. "We don't give a hoot for the traditions of Saratoga Street. And as for the cobblestones, those dreadful noisy things, I could wish them all at the bottom of the sea!"

"Then—"

The sisters waved to a faded photograph in a silver frame on the mantelpiece. It showed a young man with a curling mustache, clad in an old-fashioned uniform. "Horace White," they said, in unison.

"He courted us," the elder said. "He never would say which he preferred. I refused Rupert Roberts for him, I gave up Morey Stone. My sister sent Jimmy Taylor away, and William Snow as well. When Horace went off to the Spanish War he gave us that picture. He said he would make his choice when he returned. We waited."

Carruthers returned with the hot wine, and withdrew.

The younger sister took up the tale. "When he returned," she said, "we asked him whom his choice had fallen on. He smiled and said he'd changed his mind. He no longer wished to wed either of us, he said. The street had been prepared for cobblestone paving, the earth was still tolerably soft. We buried him there, ten paces from the gas lamp and fifteen from the water hydrant. And there he lies to this day, underneath those dreadful noisy cobblestones. I could forgive, perhaps, on my deathbed, his insult to myself—but his insult to my dear sister, that I can *never* forgive."

Miss Louisa echoed, "His insult to *me* I could perhaps forgive, on my deathbed, but his insult to my dear sister—that I could *never* forgive."

She poured four glasses of the steaming wine.

"Then—" said Mr. Linkhorn, "you mean—"

"I do. I pinioned him by the arms and my sister Louisa shot him through his black and faithless heart with Father's musket. Father was a heavy sleeper, and never heard a thing."

Betty swallowed. "Gol-*ly*."

"I trust no word of this will ever reach other ears. The embarrassment would be severe . . . A scoundrel, yes, was Horace White," said Miss Augusta, "but—and I confess it to you—I fear I love him still."

Miss Louisa said, "And I. And I."

They raised their glasses. "To Horace White!"

Mr. Linkhorn, much as he felt the need, barely touched his drink; but the ladies drained theirs to the stem, all three of them.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **PAUL GALLICO**

TITLE: ***The Roman Kid***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Tommy Thompson

LOCALE: Rome, Italy

TIME: In the 1930s

COMMENTS: *A tour de force that should become (if it already hasn't) a contemporary classic . . . Paul Gallico has "confessed" that it never dawned on him that in "The Roman Kid" he had written a deductive detective story!*

BON GIORNO," SAID TOMMY THOMPson. "*Ubi est* the—" he paused and then concluded that he had made sufficient concession to what he thought was the Italian language, and finished, "Could a guy take a gander at the Tertullian Fragment?"

The girl at the desk of the Antiquity Room of the Museo Romano flinched a little and then cocked her bright head to one side and repeated slowly, with a reflective pause after each word, "Could—a—guy—take—a—gander—guy—take—gander. Gander is the male of goose."

She stopped and looked at Tommy with the corners of her mouth drawn down and a sort of despair in her eyes.

Tommy suddenly realized that she had a face of infinite humor, and that the humor somehow managed to disguise its beauty, or rather made you less conscious of it. Unlike the Italian women to whom he had already grown accustomed during his short sojourn in Rome, she had masses of soft hair, the color of early morning sunlight, large light-blue eyes, and a small nose. But Tommy felt that here was a person with whom one instinctively wanted to laugh. So he laughed.

"Excuse it, please," he said. "Maybe I ought to talk English.

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My Italian is terrible. I wanted to get a squint at that fragment of manuscript by the first Roman boxing writer. I read a piece about it in the Paris *Herald*. They're supposed just to have dug it up and it's the only existing description of an early boxing match. Some Greek fed a Roman plenty of left hands and stopped him . . ."

The girl shook her head and said plaintively, "Why did they not teach to me the right kind of English?" Her mouth was thin, wide, mobile, and slightly pathetic. She was tiny and dressed in a long, blue smock. "I have taken very high marks in English, but it is the wrong kind. You are an American. Are you an archeologist?"

"Who, me? Jiminy, no." Tommy grinned again. He was a pleasant-looking man in his late twenties with a broad, wide-open face and a strange two-inch patch of gray that ran through his dark hair from front to back. "I'm a sports writer. You know—boxing, baseball, and stuff. I do a column on the *Blade* in New York. But I'm a sucker for this ancient history. I'm supposed to be digging up a team of Italian amateur boxers to take back to fight our Golden Glovers, but I've been spending most of my time trying to find out what sports were like in ancient Rome. Very tough. If they had any columnists in those days, they buried 'em deep."

The girl gazed at him, her face alive with intense interest. Finally she said flatly, "Americans are wonderful people. Come. I show you."

She led him down an aisle between massive bronzes and pieces of ancient frescoes to a small alcove where there was a little pedestal holding up a flat glass frame. Under the glass was a small triangle of stained brown manuscript that looked like a piece of old rag. It was six inches across the top and about four down one side. Tommy could discern faintly the black brush characters on it.

"That," said the girl, "is the Tertullian Fragment."

Tommy stared at it and then said, "Oh, oh! I knew there'd be a catch to it. It's in Latin, isn't it?"

The thing Tommy liked about the girl was that she didn't crack. An American girl would have said, "What did you expect it would be in, eight point Bodoni, with subheads?"

Instead she said gently, "I will translate it for you." She leaned over the case, her eyes shining with interest and concentration, and read slowly in her fine, precise English with the slight accent that Tommy had not yet placed:

Falernus, the Senator, in his accusations, pointed to the scandal of the Emperor [Titus, the girl explained] who saved the life of Sinistrus his defeated boxer because of his love for Aula, the sister of the vanquished gladiator. All Rome, he said, knew that Sinistrus deserved

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to die because by his defeat at the hands of the Greek, Phistra, a small but nimble boxer, who by the quickness of eye and hand and the agility of his legs remained uninjured during the combat, while inflicting many wounds upon his taller, stronger, opponent, the Emperor's gladiator drew the laughter of the multitude, thus bringing discredit upon the purple. Nevertheless the Emperor, with a glance at the box of the patrician Reglus, where sat the girl Aula, and in the face of the tumult of the mob demanding death for Sinistrus, who lay bleeding from many wounds as well as exhausted by his efforts, signified that his life should be spared. These matters, declared Falernus, were common knowledge . . .

The girl stopped and looked up. "It ends there," she said.

"Gee," said Tommy. "The little guy just stepped around and popped him. A sort of a Fancy Dan. I'll bet it was a lousy fight. I never saw one of those that wasn't. Maybe it was a splash. Titus sends his bum into the tank and then coppers on the bets. There was a dame angle in those days too, eh? Gosh, you know, you're wonderful. You translated that at sight."

"Perhaps," said the girl, "you will return the compliment and translate for me too."

"I apologize," said Tommy. "I didn't mean to be rude. Whenever I start to talk fight, I fall into that jargon. They were funny guys, those old reporters. They didn't care a hang about the sports and never wrote about them unless there was some political angle to it—like this guy Tertullus. I guess when your space was limited and there weren't any printing presses, you had to stick to things that were important. Nobody seems to know much about what a show was really like at the Colosseum because nobody ever wrote about them. I guess they just stuck up a copy of the results and the box score somewhere in the Forum and let it go at that."

A tall, stoop-shouldered man came through a door that opened from a small office at the rear of the little alcove, and spoke to the girl in German. He was gray-haired, gray-faced, and weary-looking. He wore a gold pince-nez attached to a black ribbon. The girl answered him and then turned to Tommy. "This is my father, Professor Lisschauer, the curator of the museum. Papachen, this is an American gentleman who is interested in the sports of antiquity."

Tommy shook hands. "Thompson is my name, sir. The *Blade*, New York. Sports writer. Your daughter was kind enough to translate the fragment for me."

The old man had a pronounced accent. He said, "*Ja, ja.* Leni haff just tolt me. You do not read Greek and Latin?"

Tommy shook his head. "I—I'm afraid what little education I have,

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I got the hard way. I mean I had to go to work when I was a kid."

The old man looked at him puzzled and then glanced sharply at his daughter.

"Then how can you be a student of antiquitation? It iss impossible."

Tommy felt uncomfortable. There was a detachment about the professor that shut him out completely. He did not want to be shut out. He tried to explain.

"I—I'm trying to get the feel of things. I mean the people of those days and what they were like. Behind all these inscriptions and statuary and stuff there were people—you know, human beings. They couldn't have been such a lot different from us. That fighter, for instance, I saw in one of those wall paintings in Tarquinia, squared off with his thumb stuck out ready for a left lead to the eyeball. You could just see him getting ready to say, 'Excuse me, pal,' and then cross the right while the other guy is still blinking. He must have been the Gentleman Jones of Etruria. Gentleman Jones is a light-heavy we have around New York. Polite, smooth, and very sporting in the ring, but he loves to stick that thumb in the other guy's eye. What I mean is maybe those old-time fighters were just like that."

Professor Lisschauer looked baffled, shook his head, and said, "The reading of the ancients requires years of study." He sighed. "And then sometimes it iss nod enough. You are wasting your time. You will excoose me please."

He turned and shambled away. His daughter watched him go. On her face was pain and concern.

"Gee," said Tommy, "did I say something? I guess I'm just a dumb cluck. I didn't mean—"

The girl shook her head. There was a brightness in her eyes. Tommy saw that they were close to tears. "Papachen is in some trouble. That is all. He did not wish to be impolite. He thinks only of his work. Ach, if I could only help him . . ."

"Is it anything serious? I mean is there anything I could—"

Leni smiled. "You are kind. I am afraid you would not understand. His integrity. His years of hard work. And then to lose everything." She stopped. "Forgive me. It is private trouble. I should not bore you."

She hesitated and then suddenly asked, "Have you seen the famous statue of the *Resting Boxer*? It is in the Museo delle Terme." She raised her head proudly with a significance that Tommy did not understand at the time. "It is a discovery of my papa."

"I haven't," said Tommy. "But I will. Do you suppose you—I mean, would you go along with me some time to—to—"

"Take—a—gander—at it?" finished Leni.

"The once-over," said Tommy.

"The once-over," repeated Leni. "A quick peek—"

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"A quick peek."

"You're on."

"You're on. Does that mean yes?" Leni asked.

"Yes."

"Yes. You're on."

Their laughter joined and echoed from the quiet caverns of the museum. They took each other's hands on it. Something told Tommy that this was not the time to kiss her. But there was nothing to stop him from wanting to.

They met two days later, on a bright, clear, warm spring Sunday, and went to Alfredo's, where Tommy, entranced, watched Alfredo's showmanship as he manipulated the Fetuccini in the melted butter, and later they ate his famous sole in white-wine sauce and exchanged bits of information about their lives.

The Lisschauers were Viennese. Leni's father, a famous archeologist, was the curator of the Museo Romano. Leni herself had studied with him for many years.

"Gee," said Tommy. "I knew there was something. My mother came from Vienna. My father was an American. And you can read the past as though it were a book. And yet you're sweet and simple. I've never met anyone like you. Shut up, Thompson, you're ga-ga!"

"Ga-ga?" said Leni.

"Soft in the head," explained Tommy, and then added under his breath, "about you," continuing aloud, "You must learn our beautiful language. I'll teach you if you'll help me with my ancient history."

Leni looked at him curiously with her large eyes. "You are a strange boy, are you not? You write about the sports and you are interested in antiquity. I thought Americans only cared about to make money."

"I love it," confessed Tommy, "making money, I mean; but I don't let it get me down. What do you like to do besides read old Latin manuscripts at sight?"

"Oh," said Leni, thinking seriously and counting on the fingers of one hand, "I like to dance, to play tennis, to ski, to . . ."

"That's done it," interrupted Tommy. "There's a tea-dance at my hotel at five. What do you say we go and step?"

Leni nodded her head violently in assent. They toasted each other in Lagrima Christi on that . . .

They kept meaning to go to the Museo delle Terme all through the afternoon. But there was such a fine blue Roman sky and the smell of flowers in the air—Tommy could not be sure whether it was flowers or Leni, who was dressed in a simple white frock with a little girl's sash at the waist, and a big straw hat—and also they acquired a cabdriver named Pietro Dandolo whose fine brown horse was named Ginevra.

Pietro sang snatches of operatic arias as he drove—sang them very quietly to himself. And although it was warm, he stil. wore his rusty blue coat and shoulder cape and battered silk hat, and he sang his

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orders to Ginevra instead of speaking them, which was why Tommy and Leni grew to love him. Tommy engaged him for the whole day.

He drove them through the Porta Pinciana and the fragrance of the Borghese gardens to the Plaza de Popolo. From there they crossed the Tiber over the Ponte Margherita and went rolling along the muddy river past the Castel Sant' Angelo, and the Salviati and Corsini palaces. It seemed so natural that all the time Leni's hand should be in Tommy's, and their fingers intertwined.

Tommy told Leni something about himself and the curious life he lived in New York—the constant round of prizefights, baseball games, golf and tennis matches. At fifteen he had had to quit school and start in as an office boy in the sports department of the *Blade*. His father had been a singing teacher who had been ruined by the depression.

Tommy's education had been continued by his father to the best of his ability. He had a talent for writing and had become sports editor and columnist and lived in an atmosphere of athletes, competition, and sweat. But in Tommy too, there was a reaching for beauty, and a sensitivity to human beings and what made them tick.

The bright girl at his side was stirring a yearning in him, one that he felt unable to express, except in the curious language of his life and his trade. On her part, the girl was fascinated by the strangeness of this American, his vitality and animation, but with her feminine intuition she already felt the hungry, incompleted side of his nature and was drawn to it.

They recrossed the Tiber by the Ponte Palatino and drove back through the wonderful, shining city, past the great Victor Emmanuel monument and the Palazzo Venezio to the Ambassadeurs, where they went down to the little café below and danced Viennese waltzes and Tommy taught Leni American slang and she came to look with a fond joy for the wide grin that spread over his face when he interpreted.

"You're the tops. Get it? It means there was never anybody like you ever before. You're the Number One gal."

Leni repeated after him solemnly, "I—am—the—tops."

"Here's another one. Carrying the torch. When you're crazy about someone—like 'Baby, am I carrying the torch for you!' Get it?"

"I get it," said Leni, copying Tommy's intonation exactly. "Can I carry the torch for you too, or is the torch only for gentlemen?"

The whirling waltzes and the unity that comes from the perfect matching of rhythm and movement finished them. By the time they went to the famous Ulpia restaurant, hard by the Trajan Forum, for dinner, they were in love. They sat close together in the damp cool of the grotto below with the

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magic upon them, their hands tightly clasped, listening to the little orchestra, the guitars and mandolins and the blind violinist with the wonderful throbbing tone. The old grotto was carved out of the tufa of the buildings of the Forum. Dim lanterns faintly showed the garlands of spring flowers, the hanging basket bottles of Chianti, and the bits of old marbles and pieces of ancient friezes.

Tommy said, "Gee, Leni, I've got a nerve to spring this on you this way, but I can't help it. I'm going for you. I've never gone for a gal this way in my life. Do—do I have to translate that for you too?"

Leni took Tommy's hand and held it to her cheek and shook her head that way, holding it. She said simply and directly, "Oh, strange, American Tommy. I am afraid that I going for you too."

"I want to kiss you," said Tommy. "Would anybody care?"

Leni looked at him with her eyes dancing like wood sprites. "This is Rome," she said. "The old gods would like it very much."

They kissed each other. They kissed each other again until the sweetness was no longer bearable. "Gee," said Tommy, "I heard the gods cheering . . ."

"I did too," said Leni, "only I think it was Benedetto."

Benedetto, the enormous proprietor, waddled over to the table with a bottle of wine. He said, "Bravo! Bravo! Signore, signorina, permit me, the compliments of the Ulpia."

"Looka," said Tommy, after they had drunk a toast with Benedetto, "let's get this straight now. I love you. I'll never love anybody but you. I want to marry you. But quick. I want to take you back to New York with me. I never want you out of my sight from now on."

Leni took his hand and said, "Oh, Tommy. I think perhaps I want to do so much . . ."

And then the dancing went out of her eyes and she caught her breath sharply and let go of Tommy's hand. He could see that something inside her had gone limp.

"Oh, oh—" he said. "Trouble. What is it, Leni? Is there another guy?"

The girl suddenly was frightened and a little panicky. "Oh, Tommy—I should not have let myself go so. It is so different with us here. It has been understood for so long that I will be the wife of Professor Zanni. He is Papa's associate. I know that Papachen wishes it. And we here are different with our families. Papa is everything. He would not understand you. And just now, when he is in such deep trouble. Oh, Tommy, I shall die . . ."

Tommy spoke a little grimly. "I get it. When I walk into Madison Square Garden or Twenty-one, I'm a big-shot, but in this set-up Mr. Thompson of the New York *Blade* is just John Mugg." He paused, and when he caught Leni looking baffled

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again, said, "Never mind, sweet, that's one I didn't want you to understand. Look, what is the trouble your dad's in? Tell me."

Leni said, "Oh, Tommy," again, and then replied, "It is about the statue of the *Resting Boxer*. The one—the one we did not see. Papa discovered it near the Fosso delle Tre Fontane. It was his great discovery. It is one of the most perfect bronzes ever found. Papa has written that it is in the style and manner of the sculptor Praexus in the time of the Emperor Titus. Mussolini made Papa a Commendatore because the statue is of the Golden Age of Rome . . ."

"And so—"

"And so a Professor Guglielmo in Napoli has published a paper on the statue, against Papa. He is a very important man in archeology: He has written that the statue is—how do you say?—a—"

Tommy whistled. "I get it. A phony."

"Is false. Is a fraud. Three years ago the Manzini brothers were put into jail because they had made and buried many statues that were—that were phony, as you say. Now they are both dead. Professor Guglielmo has written that the statue my father has discovered is a fraud of the Manzini brothers."

"Well, isn't your dad's word as good as his?"

"Guglielmo is an important man in Italy. He is high in the party. And we are Austrians. And proof? What is there but that which Papa has from his years of study, from his knowledge?"

Tommy chewed on his lower lip. "And unless he can prove he's right, he loses his job. Nice. This guy you're supposed to marry. Where does he figure in this set-up?"

Leni frowned. "He is terribly unhappy. He is afraid that Professor Guglielmo may be right."

"Just a pal," said Tommy. "And if your father goes out, he goes in."

"Oh, Tommy," cried Leni, "how did you know?"

"It's got a familiar ring to it, sweet." Tommy sighed. "At this point, enter our hero. And what does he do? He does nothing. On account of he's just a dumb sports writer. It's a fine plot, up to there."

"Plot, Tommy?"

"Mmmm. Boy loves girl. Girl's father does not love boy. In fact, he does not know boy exists. Girl's father is in jam. Buckety, buckety, here comes boy on a white horse, rescues father. Father says, 'Bless you, my children.' Boy gets girl. Only this one has me stopped. Cold. As a hero I'm just a columnist. Let's get out of here, Leni, and go for a drive. I want to cool my head off."

They filled their pockets with sugar for Ginevra, the horse. Pietro Dandolo was sitting on the box singing the "*M'appari*" aria from *Martha* to himself, so they fed Ginevra until he had finished and then got in. Pietro said something in Italian to Leni and started off.

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"Where is he going?" asked Tommy. "Not that it matters on a night like this."

"He says because there is so big a moon, he is driving us to the Colosseo."

The indeed so-big moon shone through the skeleton of the Colosseum and illuminated the simple white cross erected on the spot where the Christian martyrs died. Leni and Tommy wandered in through the main entrance, their arms about each other's waist, picking their way around the pieces of fallen pillars and slabs of tufa and marble cornices. The great shell of the ancient arena was deserted except for the many huge Colosseum cats who lived there. Sometimes the moonlight picked up their eyes and made them glitter. The shadows seemed alive with their slinking figures, and sometimes their shapes were outlined, sitting on the long, broken columns.

Leni and Tommy sat close together on a drum-shaped slab of broken pillar and soaked in the feel of the place, the ancient quiet, and the beauty of the rising tiers of tumbled stone and the silhouettes of the arches.

Leni began to speak in her soft, expressive voice. "There, in the center, is the box where the Emperor sat. There was a great purple cloth that hung from it. The patricians and the Senators were in the nearby boxes, according to their rank. In that little gallery above sat the courtesans. The plebs, the common people, were up at the top."

"The gallery boys," said Tommy. "I guess a chump had no more chance of getting a ringside seat at this show than a guy named plain Joe Doakes could crash the first five rows at a heavyweight championship fight at the Yankee Stadium."

"On days when the sun was too hot, or there was rain, there was a great canopy erected that covered the whole arena like a roof, a canopy of many colors."

Tommy grunted. "We're civilized. We let our customers sit out in the rain at Palmer Stadium and the Yale Bowl."

"They could let in water and cover the whole floor of the arena enough to stage sea battles, of which the Emperor was very fond. Have you seen the excavations at the other end? In the time of Titus the floor of the arena was many levels below this one. We are sitting on the dust of twenty centuries."

"I looked at them. You know what they reminded me of? The basement of Madison Square Garden, our big indoor arena in New York, at circus time. Runways for the animals, cages, dressing rooms. And nobody really knows very much about the shows they put on here, or what it was like, do they, Leni? There is the Emperor's box. There sat the big-shots, there the girls. There was a canopy. Men fought with weapons and with their hands. Christians and slaves and

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condemned prisoners were torn to pieces by wild animals. That's all."

Leni sighed. "It is all so long dead, Tommy. One must be so careful of the records one reads into stones."

Tommy sprang up suddenly from the drum of the pillar and took a few steps into the arena. The floor was white with moonlight, and the gray patch that ran through his hair looked like solid silver.

He spread his arms wide with his fists clenched and shook them and cried, "But it isn't dead, Leni. Can't you feel it? All the people. There were people here. Thousands of them. Human beings. The place was alive with them. What's two thousand years? They must have been just like us. Leni, it drives me crazy. I want to see them. I want to bring this place to life."

He stopped suddenly, shoved his hands deep into his pockets, and began to pace, and the dark shapes of the cats scattered to the deeper shadows.

He spoke again. "This couldn't have been so different from what we know—World Series day, or fight night at the Polo Grounds, or the Harvard-Yale game at New Haven. Crowds coming in to see the show, pushing and gabbing . . . If you'll listen, you can hear the scrape of thousands of sandals on the ramps and that excited hum and chatter of a crowd going to a show. You would hear snatches of conversation. They must have talked in Roman slang as they went to their seats the same way we do—'Who do you like tonight? I've got a good tip on the third prelim. A new guy down from the north—they say he's a honey, fast and shifty . . . Is it true that Decius, or whatever he was called, is out of shape? They say he didn't train a lick. A wise guy. I heard the main go was in the bag. I got it from the inside. Friend of mine who knows the guy who trains the gladiators. I'm gonna have a couple of bucks riding on Drusus. He's a house fighter. Those guys haven't blown a decision yet . . .'"

Leni was standing too, now, her face pale, reflected from the white ball of the nearly full moon that now hung directly over the black shell of the old arena. Her lips were parted with excitement. She did not understand much of what Tommy was saying, but the feeling of it was reaching her. "Oh, Tommy. Please go on."

"Crooks, gamblers, sports, pickpockets, actors, writers, just plain people out for fun, guys with their dolls, and the dolls dressed and made up to kill—I've seen their paint pots in the museums—big-shot gangsters, lawyers—Rome was lousy with lawyers, politicians—the regular fight crowd. Why, you can work right back from the numbers on the portals, Leni. If they numbered the portals they must have had tickets that corresponded to the numbers."

"Yes—yes, Tommy. They were made of bone, I think."

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"Then they must have had ticket takers and ushers. Probably political jobs. Maybe they even had programs—" He grinned suddenly. "Can't you see the program sellers standing under those arches and on the ramps, and by the stairways hollering, 'Get your programs here. You can't tell the gladiators without a program. Names and numbers of the Christian martyrs.' "

He threw up his head and gazed around the great amphitheater to the entrance arcades. "And what about grub and concessionaires? There never yet was a sports crowd that didn't get hungry and thirsty. There must have been venders selling things to eat and drink. What would the Roman equivalent have been of our hot dogs and peanuts and beer and pop?"

"Meat on a stick, probably," said Leni: "yes, and fruit . . ."

"They probably hollered just the same as ours. 'Get it red-hot here!' And wine—"

"The *vinarii*," interrupted Leni, almost breathless, "the wine merchants. They carried it around in skins . . ."

"Red wine and white. Didn't they used to cart snow down from the mountains to cool it? 'Ice-cold, ice-cold, ice-cold! Get your ice-cold *vino* here, ten cents a cup. Who'll have a cup? Sweet or sour, sir?' Noise, cries, excitement, and maybe the bums up in the two-bit seats stamping their feet because they wanted the show to begin. And the guys selling souvenirs. 'Show your colors.' The blue and the white. Hawkers, with blue ribbons and white ones. 'Show your colors, folks. What's your favorite?' "

"Oh, and little clay figurines of the gods," breathed Leni, "for the good luck."

"Sure. And statuettes of the favorite gladiators to carry or tie to your tunic the way the gals who go up to New Haven for the Army-Yale game pin a little bulldog or Army mule to their coats."

"And girls selling garlands of flowers to throw into the arena to the victors," Leni said. "There they stand, with flowers in their dark hair, and the garlands over their arms . . ."

Tommy put his arm around Leni's shoulder and pointed to the vast floor of the arena. "They had to get ready, didn't they? Set the arena for the show? There are the roustabouts—slaves, I suppose—marking off the combat areas, looking after the props, preparing the boxes of sand to cover up the bloodstains. There'd be the officials, and judges and referees and masters of ceremony, dressed up to kill and strutting like an A.A.U. official in his hard hat at a big track meet. Officials are all alike.

"The crowd is sifting to its seats. People are visiting from box to box, laughing and making bets. Whistling breaks out from the top tiers as a gladiator comes out to

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try the footing and look at the direction of the sun so that if he wins the toss he can get it to his back. I guess man could whistle from the time he had a mouth.

"And can you get an idea of the dressing rooms below? The taping and bandaging and last-minute advice to the fighters, and the swordsmen limbering up and doing knee flexes and lunges and making passes with their short swords, and the boxers shadow-boxing to warm up, the way every fighter has since guys first put up their dukes, and whistling their breath out of their noses as they punched at the air.

"And I guess maybe down in the dungeons the Christians were on their knees, quietly praying, and the other doomed stood by and watched them. And sometimes over the noise of the crowd and the cries of the candy butchers and wine sellers and hawkers you would hear from deep down the impatient roaring of the hungry beasts, the way sometimes when the circus is in the Garden and there is a sudden lull and you hear the lions from down below . . ."

Leni was crying, "Oh, Tommy, Tommy, you have made this place of the long ago so alive . . ." Her eyes were shining, and now she too stood with her head thrown back and her arms outstretched toward the slender white cross. "These things were so. They were. Oh, they were."

Suddenly she stopped short and spun around facing the man and cried sharply, "Tommy!"

Tommy was startled. There was such a strange look on her face. Her eyes were so wide. "Sweet, what is it?"

The girl suddenly placed both hands to her temples and held them and spoke in German. "*Ach, lieber Herrje! Es ist nicht moglich—aber doch—doch—*"

"Honey, what's happened?"

Leni ran to him. "Tommy, you must come with me at once. But at once. It is still early. You *will* come with me. I have had—oh, how do you say it? Something inside of me, all through me."

Tommy held her off. "Is it a hunch, honey?"

"Oh, yes, yes, Tommy. Is that the word? Something inside of me has told me something."

"Do you want to tell me about it?"

Leni shook her head. "No-no. Not yet. But you will come . . ."

She took him by the hand and together they ran out of the arena, frightening the cats again. Pietro was so startled that he stopped in the middle of the Toreador song.

"*Trenta*, Via Palestro, *e presto!*" ordered Leni. They scrambled into the carriage, and a surprised and startled Ginevra rattled them over the cobblestones and onto the smooth asphalt of the Via del Impero, at what, to the best of her recollection, was a gallop.

Leni said, "I do not want to say

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yet, Tommy. Just hold me, please."

The address was a private house, not far from the Museo Romano. "Our home," Leni said. She still had Tommy by the hand as she rang the front doorbell. A pleasant-faced elderly woman in a black dress and white apron came to the door. Leni said breathlessly in German, "Ach, Liesel. Is Papa still up?"

The woman replied, "He is not at home, Miss Leni. The Conte Alberini came. They both went away together. I believe they were to go to the Museo delle Terme."

Leni wasted no time. She cried, "Come. Oh, if it is not too late. *Presto, Pietro, al Museo delle Terme. The little door on the Via Gernaia side . . .*"

Ginevra, thoroughly outraged, clattered them past the huge gray Station Centrale, whipped them around a corner on two wheels and deposited them before a tiny iron door in a high, thick wall. Leni seized a bell pull and jangled a bell wildly and then pounded with her little fist so that the iron door rattled and clanged.

The door was finally opened by an ancient attendant in a faded blue uniform coat.

"I am Leni Lisschauer, Professor Lisschauer's daughter," Leni said. "Is my papa here?"

The attendant nodded. "*Si, si signorina.* It is a little irregular. We are closed. They are all on the second floor with the Conte Alberini. You may come."

He had an old lantern, and by its dim rays he led them, Leni still clinging to Tommy's hand, through a garden in which were many shadowy statues, to the dark and gloomy museum built on the site of the old thermal baths. It grew lighter as they went up the stairs to the second floor. The room at the far end of the museum was illuminated and they heard voices coming from it.

Leni, still towing Tommy, broke into a little run. They burst into the room. The four men there turned and stared.

One of them was Professor Lisschauer. He looked very old. The second was tall and dignified, with a black beard and a monocle. With him stood a short, fussy, bald-headed little man wearing a pince-nez The ourth was a thin man with a narrow face and long black hair combed back from a high forehead.

But the thing that caught Tommy's eye was not so much the men, but the great bronze on a marble pedestal in the center of the room. It was the figure of a naked man seated, his arms resting on upper legs, his hands encased in the iron-studded, hard-leather cesti worn by the ancient pugilists, with thongs extending halfway up to his elbows and ending in a tight leather cuff.

His head was turned to the right looking up over his right shoulder. He was curly-headed and bearded, heavy-muscled He had been through a terrific battering. On his

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right shoulder and right elbow and in the crisscrossed thongs of the right forearm were three deep and gaping cuts. His ears were cauliflowered, ballooned, and cut. His nose had been smashed to one side and cut, his lips puffed, his cheekbone swollen and gashed. His eyes showed the heavy ridges of the professional prizefighter, and traces of old scars as well as new wounds. The cesti, which were thick and about two and a half inches wide, covering the knuckles and letting the fingers protrude, had sharp cutting edges, and the two halves were held together around the hand with narrow strips of iron.

The thin man with the lank black hair made a little movement toward Leni, but her father was the first to recover. He spoke to her in German.

"Leni! What are you doing here? Who is this man? Ah, yes, he was at the museum. I remember. But why?" He stopped, turned to the group, and said in Italian, "Forgive me. Count Alberini, I believe you have met my daughter. Professor Guglielmo, my daughter Leni."

Leni introduced Tommy. The bearded, monocled man was Count Alberini, State Director of Museums and Art; the fussy little baldheaded man was Guglielmo. The thin, narrow-faced one with the long hair was Armando Zanni, Lisschauer's assistant. Then she turned to her father. "Papachen, what has happened?"

"It is all over, my child. Count Alberini has accepted the statement and the testimony of Professor Guglielmo. The Manzini brothers were once known to have made a statue of a boxer. Zanni has had no alternative but to agree with him. I have given my resignation. The Count has been very kind. He brought Professor Guglielmo here from Naples to confront me and give me a last chance to prove my case. I could not."

Leni turned to Tommy quickly in pain and in panic, and translated what her father had said. The Count was coughing discreetly and then spoke softly and deprecatingly in English. "Your pardon. But this is indeed a very private matter. This young man—" He looked inquiringly at Leni.

The girl turned. "He is an expert—" She was very close to tears.

Professor Guglielmo removed his pince-nez and cocked his head to one side and asked, "Of antiquity?"

"No," cried Leni, her young voice ringing defiantly through the room. "No! Of life!" Suddenly she turned to Tommy and wailed, "Oh, Tommy, Tommy! Do something! Make him live. Bring him to life for me the way you did the old people of the Colosseo. Tommy . . ."

Tommy caught her by the shoulders and said, "I get it. Keep your chin up. I get the picture." He faced the group of men. "Do all of you gentlemen understand English?"

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They all bowed. Zanni said, "But naturally. It is a part of education."

"Good," said Tommy. "Anything you don't understand Leni will translate for you. She's onto my jargon." He grinned pleasantly at Zanni. "Education sometimes has its limits. Leni, tell all these guys to keep their shirts on. I want five minutes with this old chap. Maybe I can help."

He stepped out of the circle and walked slowly over to the statue while the four men and the girl stood watching him. He spoke to himself very slowly as he stood in front of the great bronze, his hands in his pockets, his head cocked a little to one side.

"The Roman Kid, eh? What a licking you took! . . . Gee, shave off those whiskers, and you could be Paolino sitting on the rubbing table in the dressing room at the Yankee Stadium after Max Schmeling got through with him. What a pasting! . . . That's a lovely pair of tin ears you've got, my friend. You just never bothered to duck, eh? What a job, what a job! . . ."

He commenced to circle the statue slowly, examining it minutely. He fingered the three cuts on the right side, went suddenly to the other side and examined the left arm, whistled, and said, "Oh, oh, sidewinder!"

He inspected the hands carefully and then hopped up on the pedestal, fingered and examined the cuts on the face, the bruises and abrasions and scars. He jumped down to the floor again, and suddenly fell into a boxing stance, looked at the statue again and changed it, and then walked rapidly around it again. Once he addressed himself to Count Alberini. "These cuts," he said, "are definitely cuts? Not accidents? Ages of being buried, or being tossed around?"

"We do not believe it has been buried for ages," the Count replied with a little smile, "but the cuts and marks were all placed there by the sculptor."

"Thanks," said Tommy. "That's all I wanted to know."

He made one more circle around the statue and then backed away from it with a little gesture of salute and said, "Thanks, pal. There's been many a guy since your time who's had his ears pinned back just the way yours were."

He turned and faced the group, uttered something out of the corner of his mouth to Leni that sounded like "Buckety, buckety," and then said with a fine, studied, dramatic carelessness that delighted him, "Gentlemen, what would you like to know about this guy?"

It was old Professor Lisschauer who grasped at the straw. He said, "What? Iss there anything you can tell us?" There was deep despair in his voice, which made Tommy suddenly ashamed of his fine pose. He dropped it.

"Plenty," he said grimly. "In

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the first place, the guy was a southpaw."

"A which?" inquired Professor Guglielmo politely.

"Portsider. He was left-handed. I'll bet most guys hated to fight him. Nobody likes to fight a southpaw."

Count Alberini looked interested. "So?" he said. "How do you determine this?"

"Looka," said Tommy. "You can't miss it." He stepped up to the statue, took a pencil from his pocket, and used it as a pointer. "Here! Deep cut on right shoulder. Another on the arm just below the elbow. Another on the forearm inside the lacings. No cuts on the left shoulder or arm whatsoever. Here's how the orthodox boxer stands—" Tommy fell into the regular stance, left hand, left foot forward. "Here's how this guy stood—" He reversed his position and stood with his right foot forward, right arm extended and curled, left arm bent at his side. "Get it?" he said. "The reason he has those cuts on the right arm is because that is the part of him that was the closest to his opponent."

For the first time light came back to Leni's face. The Count solemnly walked over to the statue, inserted his monocle in his eye, inspected the three cuts one after another, assumed the left-handed boxing stance that Tommy had taken, straightened up, slapped his thigh, and said, "*Per Bacco!*"

"Uhuh!" said Tommy. "And anyway, the guy's had a busted left duke—hand, I mean. That artist didn't miss a thing. Here, you can see the swelling where it knit badly. He used the left for the Sunday punch. That would be the one most likely to go. All right. He wasn't a boxer. He was a slugger. All he wanted to do was to get in close enough to lay in that left—which meant curtains. Get it?"

Guglielmo walked over, adjusted his pince-nez, and said, "You can explain that?"

"Look at the ears on him," said Tommy. "Guys who can box don't get marked up that way. This guy's had a hell of a licking. All those bums who take five to give one wind up with pretzel ears and scarred eyebrows. He's got the musculature of a slugger too, and the legs. Here, look at all these heavy muscles behind the shoulders and down the back, and on the arms. The fast boxer and snap hitter has slender shoulders and tapering muscles. And anyway, the cuts on the arm again tell you that. Look here, Professor, let me show you. Square off in front of me."

He got Guglielmo in a boxer-like attitude. The little old man seemed to like it and tried to look fierce and belligerent. Tommy ranged himself opposite him in the left-handed stance, but with his right arm and fist completely extended in front of him, and the left cocked at his breast.

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"I can keep you off in this way. But this guy fought with his right arm curled in front of his face like a shield as he shuffled in. That's how he got those cuts where they are."

Guglielmo practiced a little, transformed himself into a slugger, examined the statue, went into a pose again, straightened up, looked at Alberini and said, "*Mirabile! . . . E vero . . .*"

Leni clapped her hands. "Oh, Tommy, bravo!"

Professor Zanni shrugged and said, "In the realm of pure conjecture . . ."

Tommy threw him a look, licked his lips, and spoke again. "Now if you'd like," he said, "I think I can tell you something about the guy who whipped him. The sculptor who did this made his sketches in the dressing room or in the arena, immediately after the fight. Now—"

Zanni suddenly showed even, white teeth. "Just a moment, my friend. How do you know he lost the fight? Perhaps he was the winner, no?"

"Zanni," said Tommy, "you ought to read a book. It'll broaden you. Do you admit that he was sketched immediately after a fight?"

"If the statue were genuine, I would. The artist has been so careful to include every mark with nothing omitted. But he might still have been the winner."

"Then the sculptor would also have been careful enough to include the victor's chaplet or garland which would have been on this guy's head if he'd won," said Tommy with his most charming smile.

"Bravo!" said Alberini and Guglielmo in unison.

"*Herrlich!*" said Professor Lisschauer. He moved over toward Alberini and Guglielmo. There was a little gleam of hope in his tired eyes.

"Thanks," said Tommy. "All right, then. The little guy who licked him was probably a Greek. He—"

It was Zanni who interrupted again with a laugh. "Hah! No, no, my friend. That is now pure fancy. You have the true-American imagination."

"You sure root for the home team, don't you, Zanni?" Tommy said.

"I do not understand this expression."

"Leni does," suggested Tommy. "Maybe you've read a book, but not the right one. There's one over in the library of the American Academy I can refer you to. Professor Stoddard gave it to me. It tells how the Greeks never punched for the body. They were purely head punchers. This guy hasn't a mark on his body. But look at his kisser. The Greeks, from all I can find out, were much better boxers than the Romans. And make no mistake. The guy who gave the Roman Kid his pasting was a little sweetheart. He fought on a bicycle, and—"

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Even Leni joined in the unison chorus, "A bicycle?" They were all hypnotized.

Tommy grinned. "Excuse me. That's one I haven't taught you yet, Leni. He fought in retreat. He knew he had to stay away from this guy or get killed."

"Why do you say a small man?" asked Guglielmo.

"Figure it out," replied Tommy. "Small men are fast. Big guys are slow. This guy is still alive, isn't he? If his opponent had been a big, fast guy with a punch, he'd be dead instead of sitting there. You could cave in the side of a guy's head with one of those things he has on his hands. But the Greek was fast enough to keep away, and probably smaller. He either didn't have a punch or he was afraid to get close enough to let one go. And the direction of the cuts and bruises on the Kid's face indicate that the Greek hooked, or punched up at him, and therefore was smaller.

"Look at the condition of the right side of the Kid's face, compared to the left. The Greek probably let him have a few right-hand smashes when he had him woozy. But he was a smart little guy and he knew how to fight a southpaw, which is more than most of our fighters do today. He kept moving, circling to his own left and the Kid's right, away from that deadly left hand, and as he circled and backpedaled, he kept popping him with left hooks—look at the way his nose is bent, the size of his right ear, and the mess he made out of the right side of his face.

"Even so, he didn't want to risk getting close enough to finish him. He had the fight won, so why take a chance? He just popped him with that left until the southpaw collapsed from the accumulation of punches, loss of blood, and exhaustion. Afterwards—"

Leni suddenly placed her hand to her face and screamed.

Her cry echoed through the high, empty vaults of the deserted museum.

"Tommy! Papa!" she was staring. "The Tertullian Fragment! The description . . . Tommy! Papa!"

They were all talking and shouting at once, Alberini crying, "*Corpe di Bacco*," Guglielmo saying over and over, "*Si, si, si, si, ma si, si-si* . . ." and Professor Lisschauer, "*Lieber Herr Gott. Aber gewiss* . . ."

"I don't get it," said Tommy.

"The Fragment!" cried Leni. "The description of the boxing match before Titus!"

"Holy smokes!" said Tommy. "I had forgotten it."

"The name—the name!" cried Professor Lisschauer. "Sinistrus, the Left-handed One. It iss. It iss. You haff here before you Sinistrus, Roman boxer of the Emperor Titus, defeated by the little Greek, Phistra, and granted his life because of the love of the Emperor for his sister Aula."

It was not strange that Leni and

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Tommy should be hugging each other, but it was a little unusual that Lisschauer and Guglielmo should be in each other's arms, and patting each other on the back, until the little man suddenly stepped back and cleared his throat and said, "I must have leave to speak. Count Alberini, Professor Lisschauer, I withdraw. I apologize. I have done a great injustice, though my intent was honest. I was wrong. The Manzini brothers have been dead two years. The Tertullian Fragment was discovered less than six months ago. They could not possibly have known of its contents. I hope that I will be forgiven. For my friend Professor Lisschauer I have the greatest esteem and admiration."

The Count adjusted his monocle and said, "Professor Guglielmo, it is no more than I expected from a man of your attainments and generosity. The resignation of Professor Lisschauer is, of course, not accepted."

Professor Lisschauer somehow made a magnificent job of not seeing where Leni had just been. He came to Tommy and said, "I wish to thank you from the bottom uff my heart, and to make to you my apologies for my attitude and my ignorance in the museum that morning. We are all too far from the realities of life. You have shamed us all . . ."

Tommy said, "Gee—don't—it catches me in the throat . . . I'm—I'm just a dumb guy who happens to have been around fights and fighters all his life . . ."

There was a pause. "I am so happy," said Professor Lisschauer, "I could to sing and cry. We will go to my house, all, and drink some wine. Mr. Thompson, Count Alberini, Guglielmo, Zanni." He stopped. "Where has gone Zanni?"

"Zanni," said Tommy succinctly, "has taken a powder."

They all looked blank, but Tommy didn't explain. They moved off down the long aisles of glass cases and marbles and bronzes toward the stairs. When they reached the darker portions and the attendant went ahead of his lantern, Tommy did what was requisite.

"You know," said Leni, when she could speak again, "I—I think perhaps boy is going to get girl . . ."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**ARTHUR MOORE**
TITLE:	***Dime Store Diamond***
TYPE:	Crime and Detection
LOCALE:	United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*A free-and-easy frolic in the gentle, if not noble, art of slang, jargon, argot, and vernacular . . . Meet McGinty and his pal Nifty — in "The 5-C's Caper."*

YOU HEARD OF EASY TOUCHES?" Nifty says to me. "Well, this here's like a butterfly on a fogbank."

"Slippery," I say. "I dunno what it is yet, but already I don't go for any part of it."

"That's what I like about you, McGinty. You got an open mind—like a safe-deposit box. Here, our ship has come in and you ain't even gonna stand on the dock and wave."

"The kind of ship that's gonna come in for us is a police boat and I would just as soon the pier collapses."

Nifty and me are old friends. He is almost as bright as a four-watt firefly and if he has thought up an easy touch, then I am going out and stand on a hill somewhere, because this is E-Day, meaning End of World.

"You goin' to knock a half G, McGinty?" he asks me. "Uncle Whiskers has been sittin' up nights just stampin' out these here C things."

Nifty spreads five one-hundred-dollar bills on the table in front of me.

Of course, that is more money than I have seen outside of a Brinks armored truck, and my eyes bug out something fierce. We are standing in my kitchen, which is large enough for six church mice who are exceptionally friendly, and I grab the wall to make sure it is real. I figure if the wall is real, then maybe I am, and then maybe what I am seeing will be, too.

I have never known Nifty to have enough green goods to cover bets on a hopscotch game. He has got a per-

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manent stoop from shooting snipes in the gutter and he cuts his own hair—sometimes even in the back.

"Where," I gasp finally, "did you glom onto that loot?" I am unconsciously listening for the sound of sirens and bracing myself for the pounding on the door which comes just seconds before they break it in.

"From Loopy Sims," he says, and I nearly keel over.

Loopy is short for loophole. Loopy Sims is a guy who would give his starving mother chopsticks to eat soup with. He is also our big competitor in the horse-fixing dodge and in certain circles he is freely known as Loopy Syringe. "I don't believe it," I say.

"Pal, you got Loopy all wrong," Nifty assures me. "He is an up-and-up Joe when the chips is down. Him and us has been on the opposite sides of the hayburners so long we ain't really got to know him."

The crisp new folding stuff and them five portraits of Ben Franklin is hypnotizing me. I am hearing Nifty's words but I am really listening to the sweetest music this side of Guy Lombardo. The things that we can do with five hundred iron men makes my knees weak. I feel like a government agency which has just discovered another undeveloped country.

With an effort which makes me groan, I tear my eyes away from the Fort Knox cabbage and look at Nifty. He is the perfect shill. He has got a face like a choir boy, but you always feel that even if he is singing *Brighten the Corner*, he is reading Captain Billy's Whizbang on the side. He has got appeal, if you know what I mean, for the mark, the sucker. A citizen may be honest as a canary with a good lock on the cage, but he don't mind getting a parking ticket fixed.

It is beginning to percolate through the wheels in my head that I ain't heard why Loopy has suddenly shook the wrinkles out of his money belt. Being of a naturally suspicious nature, I am beginning to wonder also if Nifty is the one being fixed.

"Loopy wouldn't pay that much," I tell Nifty, "for a guaranteed list of tomorrow's winners. Did you take it off his body?"

"You got it all pegged, ain't you?" he says sarcastically. He points to the moola. "That's gelt-type geetus, ain't it? Five hunnerd smackeroonies. Whassa matter, you got your rent paid?"

"'Course not, but who we gotta kill?"

"Look," says Nifty in a voice like he is trying to tout me on a longshot with a broken leg. "Relax your head muscles. We got the loot, ain't we? And we don't have to do nothin' for it."

"Nothin'?"

"Well—hardly nothin'."

"What's by you 'hardly nothin'?" Nifty is trying to be casual but he couldn't carry a spear in Ben-Hur. I edge over and sit down so I won't

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have so far to fall when he tells me we are going to ambush J. Edgar Hoover.

"We're runnin' over to the track at Quincy tomorra, right?"

"So?" I say. Quincy is a little burg about forty miles down the pike and there is a local racing meet there.

"So, nothin'. We go, that's all."

Dumb as he is, Nifty can see that ain't much of a reason for Loopy shelling out gobs of the long green. It takes me ten minutes more, but I get the rest of it. Nifty puts down a little box on the table. It is about an inch and a half square, like a ring box, and he is supposed to deliver it to some sport in Quincy.

I pick up the box and look at it. It is wrapped good with white bandage-tape and feels solid. "Why don't Loopy deliver it?" I ask.

"Because he broke his leg and can't move. I saw him myself. He's in bed with two splints."

"So he called you, you bein' such a close friend and all."

I am staring at the box, and am scared to death I know what's in it.

"We had a nice talk, me and him," Nifty says. "Like I say, he ain't a bad Joe when you get to know him. This here's important, and I ain't s'posed to tell you about it, so don't let on."

"Uh huh. What's in the box?"

"A diamond ring," Nifty says. "That's a ring box."

Nifty has never bought a diamond ring in his life, so I don't disillusion him. The box is okay, but I know there ain't no ring in it. I am sure it's full of H.

Loopy would love to get rid of us on account of we are beginning to make some good contacts, and Loopy feels that this is strictly his territory. We have been here three weeks and have already made enough to eat on, and I am hoping we can get a battery on a nag at Quincy. We might make us twenty or thirty clams. If we had dough to bet the horse, who knows?—the sky's the limit. Maybe even a hundred.

I am afraid to tell Nifty that I think he has been carrying around a load of heroin, but he lets me take charge like usual. He gives me a slip of paper with a name on it.

"That's the bird it goes to," he says. "I'm s'posed to look him up at the hotel."

We pool our resources, which comes to a little under two dollars, and I slip Nifty fifty cents to run out and get us some chow. He is all for splitting up the five C-notes right away, but I talk him out of it.

After he has gone clattering down the stairs, I open the ring box, intending to wash the H down the sink. Only I get the shock of my life.

There really is a ring in the box!

It is pure glass, of course, and the gold is already beginning to turn green. I figure it might be worth ten or fifteen cents in an inflation market. Why it is worth

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five hundred just to deliver is definitely making me dizzy.

I slip the ring into a drawer, and before Nifty gets back I wrap up the ring box again with some tape from the bathroom.

The next morning we don't even lock the door when we leave on account of there is nothing in the joint that even a ragpicker would find interesting. We head for Quincy, which is one of them towns that nobody has any trouble forgetting. We arrive at about noon on the bus, which takes our last small change. We have to walk about a mile to the track.

Our contact for boosting one of the ponies along is a guy named Sidney, last name unknown. He is a tall, nervous wreck with eyeglasses which are always sliding down his nose on account of he is sweating so much.

"Lay off," he says, looking around like a hood in a Class B movie. "Scarce out. This joint is crawlin' with the law."

"But, Sidney—"

"Not today," he says, "anyway not right now. Hang around till the last race. Maybe I take a chance, maybe I don't."

He is definite as a little duck but that's the best I can get out of him, except for six bits for coffee and doughnuts. Sidney takes off in the direction of the stables, and Nifty and I slouch over to a one-arm joint and stool up for the java and.

"Cheers," Nifty says. "We still got the five C's. Whyn't I deliver the ring?"

I stall him for a couple races, and some longshot nag, which has never won a race since Coolidge wouldn't run either, pays off 60 to 1. I am worried enough already, but that takes my appetite away. I am also edgy because I can't figure the ring angle.

"Let's get outa here," I tell Nifty. "And dummy up about the dough."

We walk back to Quincy, and Nifty wants to stop at the hotel.

"There won't be anyone there," I say. "Let's go see can we bum a ride home."

"I got a better idea," Nifty counters. "We deliver the ring and hit this bird up for carfare. How come you don't wish to bust loose with our moo?"

"Look," I tell him. "Last night I opened the box, and your ring is worth all of one thin dime. I can't place this caper, and I am worried."

"Yeah?" Nifty says in considerable surprise. "Loopy was lyin' to me, huh?"

"Like a stack of rugs."

"Then we ain't got nothin' to lose. And maybe we can still get the carfare."

I am all out of arguments but I am not out of curiosity. So I let Nifty lead me to the hotel. I am wrong again. The bird whose name is on the slip of paper is registered. Nothing makes sense.

I follow Nifty up to the room

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wondering if Loopy's mind was maybe affected by that broken leg.

Nifty knocks on the door and a gent opens it. Both of us stand there with our mouths open. The gent is holding a roscoe.

"Come in," the gent says in a voice which is not pitched as an invite. "We been expecting you." He stands back and we walk into the room like zombies. "Call the bus station," he says to another gent. "We got 'em here."

"You got what?" I ask.

The first gent is a square solid type with a shiny suit and hard-boiled eyes. He shows us a badge. "The game's up, boys," he smirks. "You fixed your last race."

"We fixed nothin'," Nifty says with real indignation.

"Sure, sure," the cop says and puts the gun away. "We know all about it." He winks at the other one. "Which one of you big brains has got the dime store ring?"

Nifty sags a little and the cop frisks me and finds the ring box in two seconds flat. "You're the guys, all right." He tosses the box in the wastebasket. Then he goes over me again, real thorough. He frowns at me, then he frisks Nifty. The other cop puts the phone down and comes over to give his pal a hand.

"Where's the dough?" the second cop says.

"What dough?" Nifty is looking at me in a funny way.

"Come on, we got a sure tip," the first cop says kind of annoyed. "You guys fixed that sixty-to-one longshot today, and now it's payoff time. Make it easy on yourselves. Where's the dough?"

"You sure got us wrong. We ain't got no dough," Nifty says, still looking at me.

The two cops go to work. They make us strip, and even rip apart our shoes. But they don't find the five C-notes, and they ain't too happy about it.

Nifty tells them about Loopy and the ring like it's all a gag, and finally his shill face gets to them. I can see they are beginning to believe him.

They keep us there two hours but finally they give up. When they leave we are trying to get dressed again.

"That's what it was," I say. "Loopy give us a come-on with that ring box malarkey. That wasn't what we were deliverin'—it was the five hunnerd bucks. And we were deliverin' the dough to them cops."

"Whaddaya mean, deliverin' the dough to the cops?"

"We didn't fix no race, huh? Loopy fixed it. He figured to pay off his protection and get us run out of the state at the same time."

"Pretty slick," Nifty says. He gives me a hard stare. "Only where's the dough?"

"You sound like a cop," I tell him. I go over to the wastebasket. "Last night I put it in this here box."

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Grand Guignol in miniature, as petits fours are cakes in miniature — petit guignol that will stay etched in your memory.

TWENTY-FOUR PETITS FOURS

by M. F. K. FISHER

PROFESSOR LUCIEN REVENANT felt almost light-headed to be up and about again after his tedious illness. For two days now, he decided with a prim little smile, it was as if he had taken a new lease on life. Suddenly, exactly 46 hours ago, he had begun to feel better instead of worse, well instead of ill.

He looked carefully at the weather outside before putting on his winter topcoat and his brown plaid scarf; that was one of the boring things about being very old—the necessary preoccupation with wind and cold . . . and of course he must be especially careful . . .

He could not afford to lose any more time on his thesis, which he had been polishing and rewriting for enough years to become almost legendary in the small American college where he had taught since he was a comparatively young man. His habit was to get everything ready to send off once more to the printers, and then, to the delight and exasperated amusement of his colleagues on the faculty, to withdraw it again—to change, they swore, a comma here and a semicolon there.

Work on the great thesis had come to a painful standstill with his illness, and he had spent most of the time since the sudden cessation of his weakness, exhaustion, and pain in putting his big study-table into good order again, ready for hard concentration tomorrow. Meanwhile, he was going to give a little party, here in his familiar shabby lodgings.

It would be a kind of reunion—of five dear people whom he had neglected as they all grew older and more preoccupied in their own dwindling powers. It was the damnable weather, surely, that most hindered the senescent: the constant fear of drafts and of slipping on wet pavements or on bathroom floors, the hazardous burden of breathing into cold winds. We sit by our fires, he admitted regretfully.

But today Professor Revenant defied this creaking cosiness that seemed to envelop them all. He had arranged everything by telephone, after a busy morning. Everyone could come, and the new strength in his own voice seemed to imbue them with quick liveliness—so that Rachel Johnson had sounded almost like a girl again, and Mrs. Mac too.

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There would be four men, then, and two ladies—a reunion of classical proportions, almost Greek, he told himself as he closed his door on the new tidiness of his bed-sitting room and walked carefully down the carpeted stairs of the old boarding house.

Outside it was colder than he had guessed from his warm inside view, but he pulled his hat well down over his shiny head, and walked more briskly than he had for many years toward the shopping district of the little town. There were few people on the streets. He recognized a couple of his graduate students, but they hurried past him, their faces buried between their shoulders against the chill wind.

He would go first to the Buon Gusto. He remembered that faculty wives had told him, before he grew too tired to accept their invitations to dinner, that the best little cakes in town came from this small bakery. It was too bad, he thought in a remote way, that he had never taken time enough from his classes and from his thesis to learn such details personally: he might have had a few tea parties himself, with some of his prettiest students nibbling and tittering in his chaste room. He smiled again primly.

The bakery shop was delightfully warm. He stood looking seriously at the glass cases piled with cakes and cookies, and felt the welcome air against his dry cold skin, and even in behind his ears, until a solid black-browed woman by the cash register asked how she could help him. He cleared his throat. It had been some time since he last spoke with anyone.

"Oh, yes," he said hastily. "Yes. I need some little cakes. For a tea party this afternoon—that is, not tea exactly, but there will be ladies present. In fact, it is a rather special occasion, and I wish the best you have, which I can see is excellent."

He was astonished to hear himself so wordy. It must be the sudden convalescence, the quick recovery, perhaps the warm shop after that cold wind. To cover his vague embarrassment, he rattled on while the woman looked patiently and kindly at him. It was lucky the shop was otherwise empty, she thought: he was one of those talky old fellows who liked to take his time.

"I had in mind something decorated," he said, frowning. "It is a kind of reunion we are having, after a long absence. All of us so busy, you know. In fact, we may even start a little club this afternoon and plan regular meetings."

"That would be real nice," she said. "Ladies like these little petits fours."

"Petits fours!" he exclaimed. "Precisely! I used to buy them in Paris for my dear mother's 'afternoons.' Thursdays, always. Very old ladies came, it seemed to me then." He laughed a little creakily, being out of practice. "But of course we are rather elderly too. Not you,

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Madame, but my friends this afternoon. Yes, petits fours are just what we need."

"They are easy to chew, too," she said. "No nuts."

Professor Revenant chuckled in an elaborately conspiratorial way which amazed him, but which was very enjoyable. "Ah, yes," he almost whispered. "I understand what you mean, exactly! Geriatrical gastronomy, eh?"

She smiled (a real nice old gentleman, and such a cute accent!), and opened the case which held the tiny squares of cake covered with fancy icings: rosebuds on pistachio green, white scrolls on chocolate, yellow buttercups on orange and pink.

"These are our specialty—made with pure butter," she said. "How many?"

The professor discussed with her the fact that there would be only six at his party, but that they appreciated good food when they saw it and would no doubt be a little hungry.

"Figure on four apiece then," she decided for him, and in a few minutes he went out with the box of twenty-four petits fours dangling carefully from a solid string over his thick woolen glove. He felt buoyant (a very pleasant young woman, and so helpful and understanding!), and his feet hardly seemed to touch the ground.

He turned toward the liquor store nearest his house, so that he would not have to carry the bottle too far: the air hurt his chest a little, and he wished to be at his best, later on.

Somewhat regretfully he asked for a bottle of good sherry. With Rachel and Mrs. Mac to be there, sherry was indicated. What was it his dear mother always offered to the occasional old gentlemen who came to her afternoons? Marsala? Madeira? It was brown and sweet, he remembered from what he used to steal from the bottoms of the glasses . . . Then recklessly he asked for a bottle of good scotch as well: it would please old Dr. Mac. In fact, it would taste very good to anyone who wanted it, as the Professor did, suddenly.

"Sure we can't deliver this, Mr.—uh? It's kind of heavy." The clerk looked worriedly at the old man.

"Thank you, no," Professor Revenant said with firmness; he must keep all these supplies under his personal control.

He walked more slowly than before with the two bottles carefully pressed under one arm, and the box of little cakes dangling from his hand, and by the time he reached the boarding house and walked up the familiar wooden front steps, he felt a little hint of his late fatigue creep into him. He shook himself in the dim hall, rather like a bony old dog, and went one at a time up the stairs to his room. An inner excitement reassured him: this would be a good party, worth all the effort and expense, all the weariness.

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As he hung his coat neatly in the closet, with his scarf in the right-hand pocket where it had been every winter all these years, and his gloves in the left-hand pocket, he looked approvingly at the big round study-table, cleared now of most of the papers and book catalogues that had piled up during his wretched illness. He had brushed all but the inkstains off the dark red cover, and had brought up six wine glasses from the back of his landlady's cupboard where she kept them for christenings and wakes, and a big hand-painted china plate.

He would put Rachel facing the door, in a faint subtle effort to make her know that if he had only had enough money and had managed to finish the thesis, he might well have asked her to share her life with him and be his hostess. But even before it could be, it had seemed too late. He sighed: too late; yet only some forty-eight hours ago he had realized that nothing need be too late. Rachel had sounded so young and warm and sweet on the telephone.

On one side of her he would put Dr. Mac, the old reprobate. Anyone who had sailed on as many ships and lived in as many foreign ports as he had would break even the ice of their many years of separation—just so long as he did not drink too deeply of the ceremonial scotch. But Mrs. Mac had a way with her, deft from long practice, of keeping an eye on the bottle.

Then on Rachel's other side would be Harry Longman. Rachel liked eccentrics, and Harry surely was that: a well adjusted garage mechanic with a degree in engineering and a Ph.D. and a history of countless liaisons behind him, even in his ripe old years, all with young girls who worked in candy stores. It was the sweets he loved, he always boasted, and he was as round and sane as a butterscotch kiss himself.

Then Mrs. Mac would sit between Harry Longman and Judge Greene, and he himself would sit next to Dr. Mac. It suddenly seemed important to him to let Rachel be the hostess and not to be the host himself, facing her boldly across the red tablecover and the glasses and the little petits fours. And that way Mrs. Mac could keep an eye on Dr. Mac and still flirt a little with the Judge, who was the kind of austere man who said very witty things in a low detached voice.

Professor Revenant put the petits fours in diminished circles on the dreadful hand-painted plate, as soon as his own hands had unstiffened in the warm room. The colors looked pretty: the little pastries in their stiff white fluted cups were like flowers, and he made a centerpiece of them. He uncorked the bottles, and debated whether to put two glasses with the sherry for the ladies, and four glasses with the scotch, and then decided against it: Harry might like sherry because it was so sweet.

For a minute he was sobered to

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realize that he had only five chairs, counting his bathroom stool and his own work chair. Then he slid the table toward his couch-bed, so that he could sit on that. It looked, he concluded, quite Bohemian.

It was almost time. He was beginning to feel the excitement like wine. What a fine idea of his, to call them together again after such a long dull dropping away!

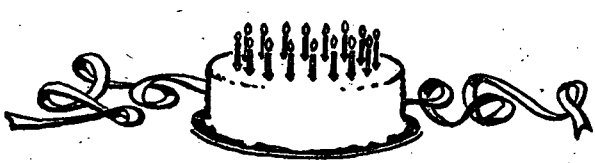
He thought of how years ago they had used to meet often at the jolly hospitable Macs, all of them perhaps hiding from outside strictures as he was hiding from the faculty dinners—Rachel's ancient mother, the Judge's drear and empty house, even Harry's sweet-sick diet of lollipops.

It might be a good idea to pour himself a little nip, a wee drop, to warm him before the fire of life took over again. He looked with another smile, not prim this time, at the pretty table waiting for the reunion, the beginning of a better and warmer time with his long-absent but still dear friends, and he considered first the bottle of sherry and then the bottle of scotch.

He decided to eat one of the petits fours on the little waiting centerpiece and then pretend not to be hungry when they came.

He had not seen the Macs and Harry and the Judge, and the sweet Rachel, since their funerals. His own, that morning, had been boring: only the priest and an altar boy and the head of the French Department had been there.

He would clear off the empty plate and glasses tomorrow, and get to work on his thesis, this time definitively . . .



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Erle Stanley Gardner
Rex Stout (about **Nero Wolfe**)
Cornell Woolrich
William Irish
Hugh Pentecost
Patrick Quentin
the **Gordons**
Julian Symons
Victor Canning
Kelley Roos
Philip Wylie
Helen McCloy
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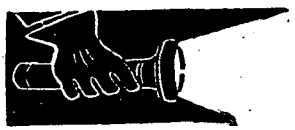

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The Argentine poet and crime-fancier Jorge Luis Borges once envisioned (EQMM Aug., 1948) a sort of ultimate detective story, in which the reader suddenly understands a solution which author and detective have never mentioned. Something very close to this is Jennie Melville's BURNING IS A SUBSTITUTE FOR LOVING (London House & Maxwell, $3.75), a novel extraordinary in its plot construction, in its subtly sensitive writing, and in its creation of fiction's best policewoman, Charmian Daniels.

★★★★★ **THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD, *by John le Carré*** (Coward-McCann, $4.50)

In 7 years, this page has not used 5 stars as much as a half dozen times; but they are demanded by the best serious novel of espionage — penetratingly written and superbly plotted — in a good two decades.

★★★★ **GIDEON'S VOTE, *by J. J. Marric*** (Harper & Row, $3.95)

Gideon and the Yard take on the peculiar problems attending a General Election, in one of the very best of this faultless series.

★★★★ **THE CHILL, *by Ross Macdonald*** (Knopf, $3.95)

The foremost living writer of the private-eye story in another firm and full-fleshed novel of character and detection. And don't miss the reprint of his 1962 Edgar-scroll-winning THE ZEBRA-STRIPED HEARSE (Bantam F2715, 50c).

★★★★ **THE INCIDENT AT THE MERRY HIPPO, *by Elspeth Huxley*** (Morrow, $3.95)

Poisoning on the Royal Commission on Constitutional Changes in the Protectorate of Hapana gives a wise old Africa hand opportunity for lively and biting satire on the New Africa and the Old England.

★★★ **COFFIN FOR BABY, *by Gwendoline Butler*** (Walker, $3.50)

Infant and adult deaths in a Welfare baby clinic motivate a tricky and effective story, cryptic in narration, eerie in mood.

My best-of-1963 survey should certainly have included a book I received too late: Walter Klinefelter's SHERLOCK HOLMES IN PORTRAIT AND PROFILE (Syracuse University Press, $5.50), a definitive study of Holmesian illustration, with copious examples admirably reproduced.

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The first exploit of The Photographer ("The Photographer and the Undertaker," in the November 1962 issue of EQMM) was included by Anthony Boucher in his Honor Roll of distinguished mystery short stories published in American magazines during 1962. Now Mr. Holding has turned The Photographer into a series character, and this second exploit is a worthy successor to the first tale of the professional assassin of Brazil, hireling of The Big Ones, who prefers to think of himself by the softer and fancier sobriquet of The Nullifier . . .

THE PHOTOGRAPHER AND THE POLICEMAN

by JAMES HOLDING

MANUEL ANDRADAS DIDN'T TELL his seatmate on the plane that he was going to Lisbon to kill a man.

In fact, being quiet and self-effacing both by preference and for business reasons, he wouldn't have told his seatmate anything if he could have avoided it. But on the long flight from Rio to Lisbon, his neighbor with the long jaw and friendly eyes quite naturally attempted to strike up a conversation with him on several occasions to relieve the tedium of the journey. One such gambit began, "You are going to Lisbon for pleasure?"

Manual said indifferently, "Not entirely. I am a photographer, Senhor—"

"Verahos," his neighbor supplied eagerly. "A photographer? Professional, or as a hobby only?"

"Professional. I go to Lisbon to do a photographic essay on that city for the *Illustrated Weekly* of Rio."

"Ah! Then you will be able to combine business with pleasure. What a delightful assignment."

"Yes," Manuel conceded. He looked from the window of the plane at the cloud cover below them that masked the long Atlantic swells.

Verahos went on cheerfully, "I go to visit my parents who are fisher folk in the village of Cascais above Lisbon on the coast. You know it?"

"No."

"A charming place to be born in, but not to live one's whole life in, believe me. I left it for Rio twenty years ago. But now my parents grow old. I wish to see them again before it is too late, you understand. So my father is to meet me at Lisbon in his fishing boat and sail me home to Cascais for my two-week holiday.

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Thus I shall see nothing of the capital this trip, alas." He sighed. "A pity, too. For Lisbon is the gayest city in the world—even gayer than our beloved Rio."

"Indeed," Manuel said. He closed his eyes. "Will you excuse me, Senhor Verahos, if I take a short nap? I slept poorly last night."

"Of course," murmured Verahos, abashed.

Manuel Andradas did not sleep, however. As the plane droned eastward, he was remembering his meeting yesterday with Rodolfo, his contact in Rio with The Corporation, The Big Ones. He had met Rodolfo as usual in the Rua Ouvador near the flower market. They had walked together to a cafe on Avenida Rio Brando, and over an inky *cafezhino*, Rodolfo has said, "You are lucky this time, Photographer."

"Lucky?" asked Manuel, unsmiling.

"Assuredly. You go abroad. To our mother country. To *Lisboa*. You take a pleasure trip."

"I do not object," Manuel said. "What is the price?"

With Andradas, the price was always the first consideration; he loved only two things in the world: money and photography, in that order.

Rodolfo's long thin lips lifted. "Five million," he said softly, and waited for Manuel's reaction.

The dull brown eyes of the Photographer flickered momentarily with surprised pleasure. "Five million cruzeiros! It is a handsome fee." He allowed himself a grin. "Am I to nullify Salazar, then?"

"Not so," Rodolfo assured him. "The Corporation's client does not aim that high."

"Who, then?"

Rodolfo wrote a name and address on the edge of the flimsy menu and turned it for Manuel to see. Manuel committed it to memory while sipping his coffee. Then he nodded. Rodolfo tore the menu into tiny pieces and placed the scraps in his jacket pocket.

"This one should be a challenge to you," Rodolfo said.

"Why?"

"You will see," Rodolfo said, and smiled. "You pay your own expenses, of course."

"*Va bem*," Manuel agreed reluctantly. He hated to think of that fine round figure of five million being reduced by even a single cruzeiro. But perhaps he could arrange—"*Va bem*," he said again.

They rose. Rodolfo paid for their coffee as he left the café. When they shook hands on the avenue, Rodolfo left a thick wad of money in Manuel's hand. "Half now," he murmured. "Good luck, Photographer." He smiled his oily smile and walked away.

Manuel hitched his camera case higher on his shoulder. On the way to the airline office to arrange for his ticket, he stopped at a street stall and had a glass of cashew juice. He liked it better than coffee.

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When the plane approached Lisbon and went into its landing pattern, Manuel could see the carpet of beckoning lights that was the city tilting up to meet him. The dark stripe of the Tagus River was tied like a stick to the illuminated balloon of Lisbon. On the bank of the river opposite the city, Manuel could make out a mammoth, spotlighted statue of Christ that seemed to float in midair with gigantic arms outstretched.

His neighbor saw it, too, and nodded happily to Manuel. "It is Christus Redemptor," he said, "just like ours on Corcovado."

Manuel said shortly, "I feel at home already."

He gathered his raincoat, hat, and camera case and made ready to disembark as the plane touched down. With a sense of relief, he said goodbye to Senhor Verahos, found his small suitcase, and was passed efficiently and quickly through the customs shed.

Then he took a taxi into town and registered at the Bahia Hotel, although Senhor Verahos had recommended the new Ritz as gayer and more modern. The Bahia proved to be much like Manuel himself—quiet, reserved, expensive, with a certain mature dignity not to be encountered in the irresponsible young.

He made a hasty toilet in his room, descended to the dining room where he ate a superb dinner, and then, after briefly consulting a map of the city in the foyer, he left the hotel.

The job had begun. And Manuel felt the small thrill of excitement that always accompanied his first step toward fulfilling one of his contracts with The Big Ones.

He found the house easily enough—a solid, square, stone residence in a quiet street not far from Black Horse Square. The tobacconist in a kiosk at the end of the street confirmed that this was the residence of Senhor Alfonso Santos. Manuel did not permit his face to show in the light as he asked his question, and he quickly withdrew as soon as he received his answer.

As a result of his haste, Manuel did not hear what else the tobacconist was telling him about Senhor Santos, or he would have known that first night in Lisbon why Rodolfo, back in Rio, had smiled when he wished Manuel good luck. As it turned out, Manuel did not discover until the next day that the man he had been hired to "nullify" was Lisbon's Commandant of Police.

Manuel found this a pretty piece of irony; but he was in no way deterred from proceeding with his assignment. He hired a tiny car through an agency at his hotel. With its aid, once he had marked down his man, he followed Senhor Alfonso Santos about like a faithful dog for two days and nights, observing his habits, studying his movements.

By the end of the second night of

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surveillance, Manuel was convinced of one fact: he could never, in the ordinary course of events, find Santos alone for long enough to nullify him safely—that is, without prejudicing Manuel's own safety. For Commandant Santos never went anywhere alone. To be sure, when he rode home at night from headquarters in his bullet-proof car, only a single uniformed policeman was with him—his chauffeur. But the chauffeur-policeman slept at Santos' house and drove him to the office again next morning.

Manuel wondered if the chauffeur were also present when Senhor Santos made love to his beautiful wife. For even Manuel, who was insensitive to such things, acknowledged that Santos had a beautiful wife. She greeted the Commandant fondly each evening in the doorway of their home, and kissed him fondly each morning when he departed for work.

Ah, well, Manuel philosophized, a Commandant of Police must be very careful, I suppose. A great many people want to kill him, no doubt. I am not alone in this desire, certainly. So if I cannot get to him, it is evident I must bring him to me. But how?

In the end Manuel found the answer in the telephone directory. Although the name Alfonso Santos was not an overly common one, there were two other men of the same name listed in the city book. One of them, a young bank clerk living alone in a rented room, was brutally awakened that night by sinewy hands around his throat, choking out his life.

Shocked and terrified, the poor fellow struggled desperately when he became aware, though still half asleep, of what was happening to him. He tore at the constricting fingers of his assailant, loosening them enough to gasp, "Stop! Stop! You will kill me!"

"Exactly, Alfonso Santos, Commandant of Police!" a muffled voice whispered back at him from the black void above the choking hands. "Of course I will kill you. For five million I would kill my own brother." The fingers tightened again.

"Wait!" the bank clerk managed to gurgle through his painfully compressed throat. "You have the wrong man! I am Alfonso Santos, yes. But not Alfonso Santos, the Commandant of Police! I am a bank clerk only! Please, Senhor, I beg you!"

"What?" the voice asked incredulously, the fingers loosening a trifle. "There are two men in Lisbon of that name?"

"Yes! Yes! You want the important one, not me! I am sure of it!"

"I, too, am sure of it now, God knows." Almost absent-mindedly the fingers loosened still more. "Such a spineless one as you could not be a policeman, that is certain! I am a fool who needs spectacles to read addresses correctly! What will The Big Ones in Rio say when they

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hear that Verahos has killed the wrong man? A mere bank clerk!"

The unseen stranger spat in disgust. Then he said grimly, "Ah, well, it is a pity, but you must die nevertheless. I cannot let you go now, you understand."

This time, when the fingers tightened, they were like wire strands. The man on the bed struggled madly. In a moment he collapsed and lay still, the coverlet tangled around his legs.

This was not, however, because he had been strangled. It was because Manuel's clever ruthless thumbs, pretending to choke in earnest, had pressed heavily down against his victim's carotid sinuses at the base of the throat, cutting off the blood supply to the brain.

Alfonso Santos, the bank clerk, was unconscious, certainly. But he was far from dead. He would emerge from his nightmare experience with nothing worse than a sore throat.

Manuel dropped a small scrap of paper beside the bed and silently crept through an open window to the alley outside. He returned to his hotel in his rented car, and slept very well indeed for the remainder of the night.

The next morning he set about earning the respectable fee promised him by the *Illustrated Weekly* of Rio for a picture story of Lisbon. He took unusual pleasure in the job not only because of its photographic challenge, but also because his fee for the pictures—hastily negotiated with the magazine after he discovered he was coming to Lisbon—would pay the "expenses" of his other assignment, thus protecting from diminution the splendid sum of five million cruzeiros he would earn for nullifying Alfonso Santos.

Using a variety of equipment, he took pictures, both in black and white and in color, of Lisbon's most photogenic scenes: public buildings, municipal parks, Belem tower, Black Horse Square, the panorama from the Castle of St. George, the Royal Palace, the Coach Museum. He motored out to Estoril and took photographs of the Casino there, and the magnificent flower gardens that led to it. He recorded on film the fairy tale Pena Palace on its soaring peak. For two days he forgot Alfonso Santos entirely.

On the afternoon of the second day he returned to his hotel to find a uniformed policeman awaiting him in the lobby. The policeman, quite politely but very firmly, asked Manuel if he would be so good as to come to Police Headquarters for a small half hour. It was thought that he could perhaps assist the police in a certain matter.

Manuel made a show of impatience and anger at being so summarily ordered to waste his afternoon, but he accompanied the policeman to headquarters nevertheless. There he was ushered immediately into the presence of the Commandant, Alfonso Santos. This Santos, seen close-up, was a rather

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impressive man—large, broad-shouldered, middle-aged, but carefully controlled as to his waistline, and with a no-nonsense manner and a bushy mustache that hid the corners of his mouth.

When Manuel was seated in his spacious office, and the policeman had left, the Commandant said, "You are Manuel Andradas from Rio de Janeiro?"

Manuel nodded. "I am. Please tell me how I can serve you, Senhor."

Santos ignored that. "You came to Lisbon by plane five days ago?"

"Yes."

"So your papers show," the Commandant said, "and our customs records at the airport."

Ah, Manuel smiled to himself, he desires me to know I cannot lie to him because he knows all about me.

As though this were indeed the purpose of his brusque opening remarks, Santos now assumed a more friendly and confidential manner. "Senhor Andradas," he said, "I have here a passenger list of Flight 1703—Rio to Lisbon—on the Portuguese Airlines for five days ago. It bears your name for Seat 14. And beside you, in Seat 15, it bears the name of a Senhor Salvador Verahos."

Manuel nodded again.

Santos leaned forward. "It is concerning Senhor Verahos we wish to inquire of you."

"Has something happened to him?"

"He has disappeared. And we would like very much to find him. In conversation with you during the flight, did he by any chance mention his plans when he got to Lisbon?"

"No," Manuel replied thoughtfully.

"Not even a hint of what he meant to do, where he meant to go, on reaching Portugal?"

"Not even a hint. May I ask why?"

"You may ask." The Commandant sat back with a sigh of frustration and said, "We have reason to believe Senhor Verahos was sent to Lisbon to kill me."

Manuel started. "To kill *you!*"

"It sounds fantastic, I know. But that would seem to be the case."

Manuel made a sympathetic clucking sound. "I do not understand."

"This Verahos throttled a man two nights ago who bears the same name as mine. But before he completed the throttling, he discovered he was choking the wrong man. It was I, the Commandant of Police, whom he had been hired to kill for five million."

"Escudos?" asked Manuel in awe.

Santos smiled. "Probably not. Cruzeiros, more likely, since the assassin was hired in Rio."

"Even so," Manuel said with respect, "five million is a nice sum."

The Commandant said sardonically, "It is, of course, flattering to be valued so highly. But you can see why I am anxious to find Verahos. I have talked with Rio on the telephone. They were of no help.

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Verahos' destination? Lisbon, they say. His background? A farm machinery salesman, respectable, travels constantly throughout Brazil, but no known close friends or relatives there. Here, his papers were in order, and he smuggled nothing through customs. Yet all trace of him vanished when he left the airport—except for his attempted murder of my namesake." The Commandant paused.

"Attempted murder?" said Manuel. "I thought the other Santos was throttled?"

"His victim, with my name, did not die, thanks to God. Verahos left him for dead, it is true. But he recovered. And naturally reported the incident to me, since I seemed to be the intended victim. In his chagrin at attacking the wrong man, Santos reports that Verahos mentioned his name, Rio, and the amount of his blood money."

"How did you know he sat next to me on Flight 1703?" Manuel allowed wonderment in a reasonable degree to creep into his tone.

"While strangling Alfonso Santos, the wrong one, he unwittingly dropped a torn scrap of an airline envelope. It showed the flight number. That was sufficient for us."

"You work fast. Two days."

"Please to think back, Senhor Andradas. You are my last hope," the Commandant said urgently. "Surely Verahos made conversation with you on the flight? It is a long one."

"I slept most of the way. I am sorry. For the rest, we talked of nothing but Lisbon. He knew the city. I had never been here. You see?"

"It cannot be helped. As a photographer on assignment, you wanted to learn all you could, eh?"

"You know that also?"

"Naturally. We asked Rio about you, too. But tell me." A baffled expression crossed Santos' face. "Have you ever heard of anyone in Brazil called The Big Ones?"

"The Big Ones?" Manuel's voice dropped with sudden uneasiness. "Who has mentioned The Big Ones?"

"Verahos. Have you heard of them?"

"Yes, Commandant, I have. Nothing clear and certain, you understand—gossip and rumor only. You know? The Big Ones are also called sometimes The Corporation, I believe." Manuel spread his hands. "Did not Rio inform you of this?"

"They disclaimed any knowledge of it."

"From fear, perhaps. Deny the existence of anything you fear, eh?"

"Who *are* The Big Ones, Andradas?"

"You know of the Mafia organization, Senhor? The Syndicate in America? The Big Ones are rumored to be its Brazilian counterpart."

For a moment Santos said nothing, although his eyes widened. "Why would The Big Ones, in Rio, send a man to kill *me*?" he asked

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then. "I did not even know of their existence. Surely I offer no possible threat to them."

Manuel hesitated. "I have heard it said in Rio that The Big Ones, for a stipulated price, will assign one of their professional assassins to accommodate a client."

"You think this Verahos might be such an assassin? A machinery salesman?"

"Who knows? It is believed in Rio that a respectable mortician was one of their killers for a time. Why not a machinery salesman?"

"But why kill *me*?" Santos returned to the central question.

Manuel shrugged. "Are you wealthy?" he asked lightly, smiling to rob the question of its insolence. "Is there someone in Brazil who might wish to hasten your departure from this life? There are many possibilities."

In a tone of sudden shocked realization Santos muttered, "My stepson?" Manuel found himself thinking of the Commandant's beautiful wife. But he resolutely turned his thoughts elsewhere. He preferred not to know the reasons behind his "nullifications."

The Commandant smacked a hand on his desk in sudden anger. "Oh, if I could but find this assassin, Verahos!" He grimaced. "I could learn . . ." His voice trailed off. "We do not even have an adequate description of this man," he said then, "except for a vague one from the airline hostess and that would fit a thousand men. Can you help us there?"

Manuel sat forward with a smile. He said quietly, "Would a photograph of Verahos help you, Senhor? I have one, I believe. A black and white."

"A photograph!" Santos' eyes became almost incandescent with eagerness.

Manuel tapped his camera case. "Right here. But undeveloped. I took an atmosphere shot of passengers embarking on Flight 1703 before we left Rio—for my article, you understand. If I am not mistaken, Senhor Verahos, my seatmate, was in it."

"Give me that film!" Santos said peremptorily.

"Not so, with permission," Manuel protested. "I trust no man to develop my films but myself."

"Then develop that film immediately. Why didn't you tell me you had it?" Santos pressed a button on his desk. "Fernando," he told the policeman who appeared, "take this man to our photographer's dark room at once."

As Manuel rose to follow the policeman, he said, "If the picture is good, Senhor, I could make many prints of it for your men to use. Also, you could cause it to be published in the city's newspapers. And perhaps offer a substantial reward for information—"

"Allow me to know my own business," Santos snapped. Then he softened. "I owe you a thousand

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thanks, Senhor Andradas. If your picture is a good one, it should solve our problem. Providing, of course, Verahos is still in Lisbon. Which he must be, if he plans to kill me, eh?"

Manuel bowed and followed his guide from the room.

The following day's newspapers carried a large photograph of Verahos' face, obviously blown up from Manuel's group picture of the airplane passengers. He was cryptically labeled "an enemy of the state" in the caption, and a reward of twenty thousand escudos was offered for information leading to his apprehension.

Manuel grinned, his dull eyes momentarily brighter. After a leisurely breakfast he packed his bag, returned his rented car, picked up a seat on the noon plane for Rio at the airline office, then checked his bag and camera case in a public locker just at the top of Avenida da Liberdade outside the Parque Eduardo VII wherein lies Lisbon's famous botanical garden, the Estufa Fria.

This enormous conservatory, filled with a riotous profusion of flowers, plants, ferns, and trees, is provided with a roof of horizontal lattices of wood to control the sunlight that enters. Its sweet-smelling interior is honeycombed with tiny winding paths, with hanging galleries amid the greenery, with murmuring fountains and arched bridges. In the park outside, white peacocks strut, swans float on a pond in noble dignity. Manuel had photographed it all two days before.

By eleven o'clock he had seen several groups of visitors enter the conservatory. Only then did Manuel walk to a telephone outside the grounds and put in a call for Alfonso Santos, Commandant of Police. Stubbornly he insisted to four different voices at headquarters that he must speak to Santos personally, on a matter connected with the "picture in the newspaper this morning." This magic phrase ultimately brought Santos himself on the line.

"Senhor Commandant?" asked Manuel through his handkerchief.

"Yes, yes. What is it about the picture in the paper? Have you seen the man?"

"Yes, your honor. I have seen him. And I know where he is at this moment."

"Where?" asked Santos in the rather bored voice of a man who has already run down a hundred false leads.

"About the reward," Manuel said ingratiatingly. "I am a poor man, your honor. A cutter of grass and pruner of bushes—"

Santos interrupted. "If you have found the man we want, you shall have the reward. Where is he?"

Manuel whined, "Rewards are often forgotten after the criminal is caught. Will you give me your word, Senhor Commandant, as an honest gentleman, that you will

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personally bring the reward for me when you come to arrest the man I have located for you?"

"You have my word, fool!" Santos ground out impatiently. "Now where is he, in God's name?"

"He has but a moment ago gone into the Estufa Fria," Manuel said. "I am Campo, a gardener there, sir. I was picking up a discarded newspaper just now and saw the picture of the criminal in it. When I looked up from the paper, I saw the very man himself! *Dios!* It was a true miracle! Twenty thousand escudos! When he saw me look from the newspaper picture to him, he hurried into the conservatory. I swear it. He is still there. Come quickly with your men. And your honor—"

"What?" Manuel could hear Santos shouting orders in his office.

"Do not fail to bring my reward, if you please. You gave your word. Campo, remember the name, sir. I shall make myself known to you after you capture this dangerous enemy."

Manuel permitted himself a faint smile as he left the telephone booth. He paid an admission at the gate of the Estufa Fria and disappeared inside to await the arrival of Santos and his men. He concealed himself behind the fat fronds of a large banana tree near a fountain close to the entrance.

He had chosen well. For when the police arrived—eight of them including the chauffeur-bodyguard who drove Santos' car—Commandant Santos selected the fountain clearing in the green jungle as his command post. His men were ordered to fan out and comb the byways and galleries of the gardens; to screen the wandering tourists in the conservatory as unobtrusively as possible for the wanted assassin, Verahos.

Commandant Santos himself, with his personal bodyguard, stayed by the fountain to await results and to prevent anyone from leaving the place until the search had ended. The bodyguard kept a hand on the flap of the pistol holster at his belt while his eyes shuttled warily this way and that—ostentatiously looking for danger like a clown in a carnival, Manuel thought.

Silently, Manuel took from his pocket a plastic tube about four inches in length. He removed from it a device that looked for all the world like a feathered dart except for an odd plunger arrangement on its weighted forward end where the needle was. It was a weapon of Manuel's own design and he was quite proud of it. With unaccustomed whimsicality, but with perfect logic, he called it his "sleep gun." For the dart contained 100 c.c.'s of a potent liquid tranquilizer which, when the dart penetrated a living target, was forcefully ejected into the body from the hollow needle.

Manuel stepped from his concealment long enough to throw this dart, with a powerful overhand jerk

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of his forearm, at the broad back of Santos' bodyguard half a dozen paces away. Then he melted behind his banana tree once more.

He heard an exclamation from the bodyguard, a sort of choked-off grunt. Peering through the leaves, he saw the man reach frantically behind him to explore the cause of this sudden stab of pain, and in the same motion, spin around to face Manuel's hiding place. Santos turned, too, at his bodyguard's exclamation, and regarded the men with surprise.

"What's wrong?" the Commandant asked sharply.

"Something stung me," the man replied, puzzled but not yet alarmed. He brought from behind his back, with a hand already noticeably slow and lethargic, the dart he had plucked from his flesh.

"What is that?"

"A—a dart," the man began, speaking somewhat thickly. Then awareness seemed to hold him for a moment. He said, "My Commandant, I beg you, look to yourself . . ." just as the full effects of the tranquilizer hit him and he collapsed comfortably to the stone paving, sighing as contentedly as a drowsy baby. His eyes closed.

"*Dio!*" Santos murmured in utter bewilderment. He bent over his companion anxiously, unconscious for the moment of his own peril.

The water of the fountain made a faint tinkling sound as it fell into its stone basin. So Santos did not hear the slight scrape of shoe on stone as Manuel took five long, quick strides from behind the banana plant, placed hands like iron clamps around Santos' throat, and squeezed with paralyzing strength.

In a mere ten seconds the wildly threshing body of the policeman had been dragged silently out of sight up a little pathway. And when Santos was no longer capable of crying out, Manuel drew back his stiffened right hand and delivered the fatal blow efficiently and silently to the side of Santos' neck, just under ear and hairline.

The Commandant crumpled to the path bonelessly. After a quick look around, to make sure he was still unobserved, Manuel withdrew from his pocket his Minox camera and photographed Santos' face, close-up. The spark of the tiny flashbulb was no more noticeable in the slatted sunshine of the conservatory than a bird flying across the latticed roof.

Then, with a sense of pleasant anticipation, Manuel stooped and felt in the breast pocket of Santos' uniform. He nodded. Yes, Santos was indeed an honest man. The reward money for a poor gardener named Campo was there.

When Santos' body was found in the Estufa Fria, Manuel was already in a taxi on his way to the airport, with his "sleep gun" dart safely restored to its tube in his pocket.

Two days later, over a beer in a café on Corcovado, with the Christo

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Redemptor looming above them, Rodolfo said to Manuel, "So, Photographer, your first failure. This time, you were beaten to the prize, eh? I was sorry to hear of it."

"Failure?" Manuel returned equably. "I did not fail, Rodolfo."

He handed Rodolfo an enlargement of the miniature Minox picture he had taken of Commandant Santos in the Estufa Fria. Plainly visible in the photograph were the unmistakable signs of death: contorted, congested face, bulging eyes staring at nothing, cruel contusions on the policeman's neck.

"Does he look alive and well?" asked Manuel with heavy sarcasm. "And could I take this photograph of him if I were not there?"

Rodolfo examined the picture. He said "The radio reported that he was killed by an enemy of the state—a Brazilian from Rio named Salvador Verahos. A wanted man, known to have been in the conservatory when the Commandant arrived. A desperate man who disabled a bodyguard by some magic, killed the policeman under the noses of his men, stole money from his body, and somehow escaped after his murderous attack." Rodolfo lifted his head. "This is not speculation, Photographer. This is fact. The authorities in Lisbon even have a photograph of the murderer, this Verahos. How do you explain this?"

"I do not explain," said Manuel. "I merely suggest that you present your client with my proof." He nodded at the photograph of Santos. "And have the other half of my money for me tomorrow."

"What about this Verahos?"

"Ah," said Manuel, clicking his tongue against his teeth in deprecation, "it is men like Verahos who give Brazil a bad name abroad, is it not?"

Looking across the table into Manuel's muddy, unsmiling eyes, even Rodolfo, the emissary of The Big Ones, felt a small bead of fear roll between his shoulder blades. But only for a moment. He picked up the photograph of the dead Santos and rose. "Very well," he said. "Until tomorrow, then."

Manuel nodded and finished his beer. "Did the radio say," he asked Rodolfo then, "that there is a reward offered for Verahos?"

"Of course. He is, after all, an enemy of the state. And a known murderer. They want him more now than ever." Rodolfo paused. "Why do you ask?"

A gleam came into Manuel's carefully lowered eyes. "Because," he said quietly, "if there is a reward, I shall write and claim it. For I can tell them where to find this Verahos."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 262nd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . It is a "first story" which reveals a remarkable sensitivity to (and note the coming quotation marks) things "refined" and "elegant" and "genteel" . . .

The author, when asked for a brief dossier, wrote: "Since this is my first venture beyond printed rejection slips, I am in uncharted territory . . ." However, here are a few "vital statistics": age, 28; past occupations: brush salesman, house painter, furnace cleaner, department store clerk and window dresser; lived (!) and worked in a "funeral home"—all "in addition to the normal pursuits of a student." Later: six years in the Air Force; studied at the Kabuki-za Theatre in Osaka, Japan; attended North Carolina State College, majoring in Philosophy and Religion; manager of a Credit Bureau; stage designer for little theater productions and one of the organizers of a "pseudo-beatnik coffee house" . . . It will be fascinating to see what the future brings forth from this "writer-to-watch" . . .

THERE IS NO DREAMING

by KYLE MONTGOMERY

LIFE HAS BEEN BENEVOLENT, MUSED Miss Clarice, and then wondered whatever prompted that thought.

Mama would definitely not agree.

With the intrusion of Mama in her thoughts, Miss Clarice cocked her head like a sparrow suddenly alert to a feline threat. Her water-pale fingers pecked at the lace jabot of her black crepe dress as she listened. Then she sighed and returned to the open book on her lap.

The book, a volume of Donne's poems, was Clarice's weekly nepenthe—a release from the accumulated tedium of a life spent teaching twelfth-year English Literature. Even a sparrow can admire the canary's trills, although she might never sing them herself. Thus the ritual of Saturday-afternoon retreats into poetic privacy—even throughout the empty weeks of this summer vacation.

Perhaps the bittersweet bonbons of Emily Dickinson might have been a more felicitous choice, but this afternoon found Miss Clarice Odette Foster prey to a vague desire for stronger fare. A prolonged diet of dry husks screamed for the sub-

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stance of suet. The bony brittleness of age sought a lusty affirmation of life.

To further escape the snores of her mother, Clarice chose the peacock chair on the side porch as her bower for the vicarious release through Donne.

"*For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love.*"

Miss Clarice paused in her reading and shook her head. Although well into her eighties, her mother possessed a disgustingly healthy and forceful snore. She more than matched Donne's lustiness.

Allowing Donne to rest on her narrow lap, Miss Clarice reached for her woven straw fan. The sun had moved over the porch and now it angled its light through the gingerbread onto the gray-stitched auburn hair of Miss Clarice.

. . . *Clair de lune* . . . No, red moonlight . . .

Ages ago, back in the greengage years before the emptiness, the boy next door had whispered such words to a petite but big-eyed girl in the moon shadows of the orchard. But moon shadows are pale things and the sun is a fiercely maternal dispeller of shadows. Still, memories of the orchard remained—remnants of the plums and apples still stocked the drying racks in the attic and the riotous grapes were jellied and sealed with paraffin on the cellar shelves. But . . .

That was the past now: one did have responsibilities.

Thoughtfully, Miss Clarice whisked the air with a violet-scented handkerchief. Then she dabbed her temples with the cool linen and indulged herself with the palest of smiles. While, with fur-soft tingles, the enervating warmth of the late sun gently brushed against her and curled purring about her. Such unusual warmth for this time of the year; and yet, so unlike that of Springtime.

For a moment, but only for a moment, she considered moving the chair to the cooler shadows of the overhang. Could Mama see Clarice unshaded in the sunlight, she would more than scold—too much sun freckled Miss Clarice. But, despite her ubiquitous suspicions, even Mama could hardly accuse the sun of defiling her daughter's hands with that lacework of brown freckles. No, a more devious seducer had eluded Mama's traps and enshared Clarice's hands in those nets of age.

As the declining summer flush enveloped her, Miss Clarice relaxed and gazed languidly over the porch railing and beyond the Golden Raptures, Talismans, and Orange Delights. Then, with a start, she leaned forward.

Such a brilliant red! So vibrant in the sun's glare.

Her fan agitating the heat, Miss Clarice studied the crimson automobile parked beyond her neat but militant row of irises.

Not that this was her first notice

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of the vehicle: it had made frequent week-end appearances during the summer months. And one afternoon while Clarice was snipping dead stalks in the iris beds, the neighbor woman had explained its presence—a gift to her son at college. Surprising that she had not noticed it earlier this afternoon. Such an impressive vehicle and so . . . so vital.

Suddenly repelled, Miss Clarice twitched away from the railing.

Surely it could not be. Miss Clarice blinked, then she looked again. Impossible! It must be her imagination again—that could not possibly be a snake coiled beneath the front tire. It must be another product of her exhaustion; yes, she was mentally and physically depleted, and vulnerable to such imaginings.

Or—of course!—the sun. She should have thought of that immediately.

Miss Clarice ventured back to the railing. Imagine such a fantasy! Fascinated by her mirage, she stared enraptured, almost hypnotized. It puzzled, yet it somewhat pleased her.

Then it shocked her.

Slowly at first, but unmistakably, she could see the snake beginning to writhe and uncoil. Even stranger, she could almost feel the sinuous surge of latent energy. Then Miss Clarice jumped.

Spewing water, the snake flopped violently against the tire.

Clarice giggled.

How silly! The snake proved nothing more than a garden hose of green plastic. Whatever possessed her?—to imagine a snake! Would Mama laugh over that fancy! Clarice could almost see her; she could almost imagine . . .

Clarice stiffened, tensely aware of something behind her. Her head inclined toward the French doors. Her ears strained for the repetition of a sound, the ponderous thump-thump-thumping of Mama coming down the stairs. But a gift of silence reassured her.

She eased back into the chair and anxiously gathered Donne once more to her tremulous bosom. How could she have allowed herself to be deceived so? This troubled her.

"*Or chide my palsy, or my gout,*
My five grey hairs . . ."

For a while it had looked as though Mama was determined that Clarice never forget that ancient episode of the hair rinse. Such a trifling matter, really. However, since the incident Clarice had been spoon-fed large portions of endless homilies on all matters virtuous. It had seemed so harmless at the time, but then, as usual, Mama was correct. One must never, even once, forget one's position . . .

Miss Clarice looked up.

Something moving had forced itself into her thoughts. She edged forward to the railing again.

A young man in yellow swim trunks moved from the neighbor's

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porch to the car. Perched atop his head was a battered straw hat with its wide brim upturned in front and down in back. Something in his jaunty manner tugged the strings of Clarice's reticule of memories, or perhaps it was the teasing melody he whistled. The strings snarled and Clarice never knew which—memories or melody. She was still fretting when the young man picked up the hose, adjusted the nozzle, and began to wash his car.

Miss Clarice stared, caught herself doing so, and flicked her eyes around to the French doors. Mama's snorts continued their normal spasmodic tempo.

Clarice waited until her breathing slowed before she returned to Donne:

". . . *or ruined fortune flout*"

And yet, it had not seemed as wanton as Mama insisted: the rinse merely hid the gray. Not at all the same as actually dyeing her hair with one of those delightful colors. It merely hid the gray—as unobtrusive as the rinse which tempered Mama's hair with steel-blue glints. But one should not argue with Mama. She knew what was best for her daughter, didn't she? Still . . .

The vigorous sibilance of the hose insinuated itself in Clarice's reverie.

She looked across the irises and smiled—an unguarded and full smile. In his haste the young man had overlooked closing one car window. An indulgent smile now. She would not have been so careless; each window would have been inspected—nothing left to chance. Always be doubly certain all windows and doors are shut and firmly bolted before climbing the steep stairway to bed. One can never be too cautious. An ounce of . . .

What a rich shade of yellow, Clarice thought—almost golden.

Young people wear such vividly alive colors nowadays. Not at all like the drab colors which Mama had always selected for her—dusty lavenders and lace-frosted grays. Why must propriety be shrouded in dead colors? Was there a special virtue in funereal black, or was it a virtue in itself? Black—the color of guilt? Or of confinement?

But not so with the uninhibited youths of today. Although she had once agreed with Mama that some of today's clothes were too exuberant and possibly a trifle too brief. And yet, were they? They thrived in the fires of the sun: they did not flinch in the passion of its scorching fingers. They were too young for a true loss of innocence. How often this summer Clarice had admired the brazen youths littering their precious laughter like scraps of tinsel across a landscape uncluttered by watches or jolting alarm clocks. Admired and envied them. How different from when she was young. When she was young? Yes, in the days of her earlier innocence, she too had loved colors. But as innocence dried, the colors died.

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Miss Clarice stirred and patted her brow. How odd—to feel chilled in the sunlight. Why, she even had goose pimples!

Falling back into the wicker chair, Miss Clarice glanced behind. If Mama could know, whatever would she think?

Mama's snores blared indifference through the French doors.

Yes, Mama certainly relished her afternoon naps. She virtually wallowed in abandonment and Clarice envied her the ability to derive such uncorseted pleasure from those deep slumbers. Earlier, during the peak of the summer heat, Clarice made a timid attempt to emulate Mama, but she soon found it impossible. Sleep just would not come to her. Welts from bone-clean stays of worn memories resisted her efforts and a whirlwind of uncomfortable thoughts buffeted her with a rush of wistful anxiety. Strange thoughts and new doubts; sudden hopes bearing worse fears.

Nor could she speak of them to Mama. Even if Clarice could have forced herself to do so, Mama was inaccessible—she was much too practical. True, Mama would have listened to every word, but she would have snorted and expressed her opinion by dialing the druggist for a tonic or a refill of Clarice's heart medicine. So Clarice granted Mama the right to undisturbed sleep.

He was leaving.

Surely he wasn't finished already.

Her lips trembling, Clarice pushed herself forward in the chair. Why, she could not remember, but the young man had become an essential part of the afternoon and its pulsating warmth. And now he was leaving.

Her hands fluttered her jabot, flitted to her hair, then fell to her lap. With a sigh she glanced at her book and tried to re-knit the metered threads of her reading:

"*Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?*"

The needle slipped through the threads and pricked the heavy hand of memory. Briskly, Miss Clarice bandaged the wound and thrust it away. As an additional antiseptic measure, she closed the book.

In time to notice the young man returning.

The sun nestled now in the crepe myrtles and sketched the scene in limned silhouettes. Still his bathing trunks blazed golden and Clarice removed an unexplained tear from her eye.

Then she placed Donne on the rattan side-table.

Behind her, Mama droned on, but Clarice ceased to notice. Other sounds held her and the air was rose-scented and gilded. She trembled, then fretted with her fan. Silly boy! Such a foolish thing to do. When he sloshed water into that bucket, most of his soap was washed away—so wasteful. And yet, so typical . . .

Choked by a sudden tightness in her throat, Clarice swallowed.

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How like the boy next door—not this one, the other one. So long ago. If she could see him, what would Mama think of this one?

Miss Clarice raised her fan and lowered her eyelids.

From the willow beyond the porch shot the raucous jeer of a bluejay. Once there was a mockingbird in that tree, but the bluejay drove it away. So long ago.

The young man screamed.

And Miss Clarice's eyes snapped back to the other yard. Then she frowned. A young girl was there, spraying the boy with the hose. Hopscotching back and forth, he tried to tease the hose away from her. Together they laughed. While Clarice deepened her frown. When had she come—from where?

Louder and louder the boy laughed—a vibrant burst of joy. Its vigor chafed Miss Clarice and she did not know why. Sadly, she watched; silently, she listened to the crystal sparks of the girl's giggles. Isolated in their private universe, the two mated their glee.

Then the boy snatched the hose and was chasing the girl. Trying to dodge the whipping water behind her, the girl tripped and fell. In the middle of Miss Clarice's iris beds.

"Watch out!" The sharpness in her voice surprised Miss Clarice as much as it did the young couple.

"I'm awfully sorry," the girl said, as she brushed dirt from her tanned knees. "I . . . that is, we . . ."

"It's quite all right," murmured Miss Clarice. "I do hope that you haven't harmed yourself."

"Are you okay, Sally?" the boy asked, placing his arm around her shoulders. "We're sorry, Miss Clarice. We were fooling around and forgot about . . ."

"There is nothing to worry about, Robert. No harm done." Miss Clarice averted her eyes from the glare of the setting sun. "You children run along now."

"Come on, Sally. You'd better wash your knees," he said and turned her away from the porch. "If I can do anything. To help fix those, Miss Clarice, let me know."

"Yes . . . Robert."

Quivering, Miss Clarice returned to her chair.

How young they were—how very young. And yet, already he knew how to care for her. Had it been so when she was that age? Miss Clarice struggled to recall: it was such a long time for remembering. Yes, he had been the same, in his way.

Even after the many years Miss Clarice still spoke of—no, thought of—the young man next door as an impersonal *him*. Since that moon-splashed interlude she had yet to mention his name. The indifferent pronoun softened the edges of memory. That was all, for nothing had succeeded in erasing it from her thoughts. Not even Mama.

Pressing its heat closer to the ground, the sun settled deeper into the crepe myrtles.

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With a vague effort, Miss Clarice reached for her book and prepared to reconcile herself with the jilted Donne:

"*Call us what you will, we are made such by love*"

Miss Clarice broke off the reconciliation: it required an expense of energy which she suddenly felt lacking.

Across the crumpled irises the young man returned. Gone was the previous carefree attitude. As he hurried to complete his task of washing the car, he tossed frequent sullen glances in Miss Clarice's direction.

In the corner of the railings a fly buzzed in the tangles of a dusty spider web, but Miss Clarice did not hear it. Merged with the louder drone of Mama's snores, the buzzing became one with the metronome of sound beating within Clarice. Throbbing sounds. While over and around her, the passing sun continued to weave its lulling spell.

Clarice flicked the linen feebly.

She gazed on the boy and gently wondered.

So young and golden. But he has lost his smile. Why doesn't he smile any longer? Certainly he isn't frowning because of the irises. She had assured them—no harm done. The irises have bloomed their full this year. She did so wish he would smile again. Too young to frown. Mama, why doesn't he smile?

The sun was in the hedges now. How warm it has been today. And so tiring. If only she could sleep like Mama. So tired. And—fuzzy. I wonder why. So like the whisper of a myriad butterfly wings. Must be from the sun. So warm. A warm and listless feeling. As if I'm floating—in a cloud of butterfly wings. He said I floated on the moonbeams. Ah, at last, he is smiling again. Mama. Robert is smiling again. May I go, Mama?

Yes, I understand. I know, Mama —I understand—

It's time for bed, Mama. Are your windows bolted?

The windows, Mama, the windows . . . "Here, Mama, let me help you with the stairs" . . .

Anxiety wrinkled Clarice's face as she tried to rise from her chair. But as she lifted her hand, a Monarch glided noiselessly down upon it and the weight was too great for Clarice to support. She faded to the color of defeat and allowed the beating wings to press her back into the chair.

"I . . . I hope there is no dreaming."

Her hand fell inert across the closed book.

Completely entwined, the fly no longer buzzed. It waited also.

Beyond the Golden Raptures, Talismans, and Orange Delights, beyond the crushed iris blades, the young man coiled the hose. Carrying the pail, he walked to the house. Once he glanced over his shoulder—toward the other porch where Miss

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Clarice primly sat, her tilted head resting in the unruffled lace of her jabot.

From the kitchen the young girl rushed out to meet him.

"Through?"

"Yeah," he answered, as he dropped the pail.

"Come on in then. We're making lemonade."

"Coming."

At the kitchen door the girl turned. "Sammy . . .?"

"Unh-huh?"

"Why did Miss Clarice call you Robert?"

"Who knows?" He shrugged. "Mom says she's been acting kind of funny ever since her mother's death."

"Oh, yes, I remember. She was the one that fell down the stairs, wasn't she?"

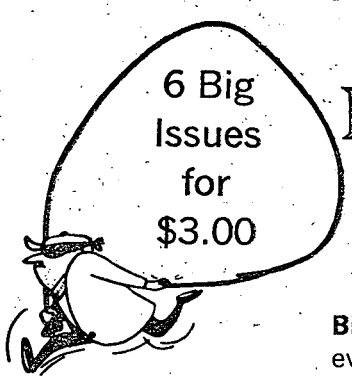
"Yeah, something like that."

"What do you mean?"

"You know—maybe Miss Clarice flipped and pushed her Mama."

"Silly! A sweet old lady like Miss Clarice? You're kidding."

"Maybe." He shrugged. "C'mon. Let's try the lemonade. I'm beat, and that sun was murder."



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This is Vern Gaudel's "second story"—his "first story" was "Foggy, Foggy Night" in the September 1963 issue of EQMM and it showed what this new writer could do in a mere 650 words. Now Mr. Gaudel, for his second effort, lengthens his stride, and shows us something else—that he has an instinct, a sure touch, for detective-story plot. Mr. Gaudel is working in the grand tradition, and we expect grand things from him in the future.

THE DETECTIVE IN THE IRON LUNG

by VERN GAUDEL

PETE RODNEY FELT FINE—COMparatively speaking, that is. It's pretty hard to feel really "fine" when you're confined to an iron lung, and all you can move is your head—from here to here.

But compared to the way he ordinarily felt, he certainly felt much better than usual, and it was hard to say why. There was something in the air. Something about the hospital was different today.

An undercurrent of excitement, a backwater stirring, he said to himself. Something has disturbed the steady, even flow of events that makes one day in a hospital seem like every other day. Nurses were a little late answering bells; little whispering groups formed in the corridor, broke up hurriedly, only to form again. There was an almost audible hum of agitation—he could "feel" it.

When Nurse Kelly answered his special ring she seemed excited. "What is it, Mr. Rodney?" she said, glancing back through the door, as if fearful she might miss something.

"That," said Pete, a little plaintively, "is what I would like to know. What's going on? Did Ben Casey smile at somebody?"

"Oh," said Nurse Kelly, who was young, inexperienced, and generally referred to as "cute." "Didn't you hear? It's about that Mr. What's-his-name, DeVery or something, the one they call The Dutchman—over in the other wing."

"Old Corny?" asked Pete. "I didn't even know he was here. What's wrong with The Terror of the Underworld, the Boss of the Slots, the King of the Numbers, and all the rest of it?"

"Well," said Nurse Kelly, "he was supposed to have exploratory surgery this morning, but when they went in to get him"—she paused for dramatic effect—"someone had cut his throat from ear to ear!"

"Hurray for our side," said Pete who in his active days had often

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tangled with the Vice Lord's underlings, although never with the Big Boy himself. "Glad to hear it. But there will be repercussions. Yes, indeed, repercussions all over the place."

"But the funny part is," Nurse Kelly went on, "it was impossible. Nobody could have done it. There was a nurse sitting at a desk not twenty feet from his door all morning, and she swears nobody went into his room all morning except 'personnel in pursuit of their routine duties.' It was that old Forsythe—you know how she talks."

"On what floor did this gory miracle take place?"

"On the ninth floor," Nurse Kelly said triumphantly. "And there's nothing but a straight drop on each side—oh, you know what I mean!"

"Hmm," said Pete. "No fire escapes, no convenient ledges? No adjoining buildings? What about the roof?"

"Why, Mr. Rodney," said Nurse Kelly, "you know the roof. You've been there. It's all glassed-in. The solarium, you know."

"Oh," said Pete, "is that the wing?"

"Yes," she rushed on, "and right below him is old lady Bigelow—you know the one, she must be a hundred and twenty. Never sleeps at all, and wakes up at a whisper."

"Then it must have been done from the room above, or by helicopter."

"Ha!" said Nurse Kelly even more triumphantly. "That whole section above his room is where the diet kitchen is, and that's always full of people. You can't even swipe a glass of milk out of the refrigerator without getting caught. And above *that* is the operating room."

"I give up, Nurse," Pete joked. "How did you do it?"

Miss Kelly looked at him indignantly. "I thought you'd be interested," she said. "Aren't you the guy who used to be a private eye, or something?"

Pete sighed. "Yeah, I'm him," he admitted. "Nurse, are you sure you've told me everything? . . . Then it *is* a poser. Hmm . . . Give me something to do. Why don't you come back after lunch and we'll theorize a little. And if you want to help, see if you can find out if he had any visitors last night."

"Okay," she said eagerly, "and I'll bring all the newspapers that are out. Maybe you can figure it out."

"Honey," said Pete solemnly, "I've got a hunch nobody can figure this one out but the guy who did it. And personally I think he should get a reward, or at least a medal. But let's give it the old college try."

When Nurse Kelly returned to Pete Rodney's room that afternoon she found him in exactly the same position she had left him. This did

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not surprise her. Mr. Rodney, she knew, was always in the same position in his iron lung—flat on his back, looking at the ceiling, able to move only his head, a little from left to right and back, and with an extra effort to push his special nurse's bell with his chin.

She supposed he must be out of the lung for brief periods, but she had never seen it. Being only a novice nurse, her time was taken up mostly with menial duties.

But right now she was on her own time, and eager to help solve what had already become in her mind the Great Hospital Mystery.

"Hi," she said with genuine cheerfulness. "Did Nurse Graham take care of you while I was gone?"

"Oh, sure," Pete said. "I've been fed, and burped, and all the rest of it. What did you find out?"

"Well, I talked to the nurses who were on duty in Mr. What's-his-name's section last night, and they say he didn't have any visitors at all yesterday—not a single one, day or night. He told them so himself. It seems there's some guy supposed to report to him every day, on what the Numbers take was, or something; but this guy never showed at all, nor anybody else, and he was pretty mad about it. He said these guys that left him alone to stew in his own juice all day, they'd find out who was Boss as soon as he got out! You know what I mean?"

Pete smiled. "I get the idea that Old Corny had no visitors whatever yesterday, either day or night. Is that your testimony, Nurse?"

"That's what I said," she replied, a little put out. "But anyway I can't see why it makes any difference. What's yesterday got to do with today?"

"Well," said Pete slowly, talking more to himself than to her, "you said, and check me if I'm wrong, that Old Corny—and by the way, his real name is, or was, Cornelius de Vries, commonly known as The Dutchman, and he controlled all the vice and rackets in this city—you said his throat was cut in a room where access to the window was impossible, and a nurse was stationed right outside his door. Now about that Nurse: what did you say her name is?"

"Oh, Miss Forsythe, Don't get any ideas about her. She wouldn't break a regulation if her life depended on it, or yours either. If she says no one went into that room but authorized hospital personnel, believe me, it's so. And she wasn't on ordinary duty, she was on Special—checking records of former patients for one of the doctors—and she never left her desk for a minute all morning."

"You're not making this any easier for me to solve, Miss Kelly."

"Well, that's the way it was. And you didn't tell me why all that stuff about yesterday's visitors."

Pete considered the vast white expanse of ceiling above him. "No-

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body could have gotten in through the window," he said. "According to you and Miss Forsythe, nobody could have gotten in through the door. This is a modern hospital—no sliding panels, trapdoors, or secret passages. But in private rooms there are closets, some of them quite large. I thought perhaps a visitor had hidden in The Dutchman's closet overnight, and done his stuff this morning. But if there were no visitors at all yesterday, that knocks one theory out.

"Let's see now . . . yes, there's another possibility. And here's how you can help—legwork they call it, and I'm sure your legs are more than adequate. Now, listen carefully, Nurse: go to a phone booth and look up the number of a man named Harry Kermitt. That's K-E-R-M-I-T-T. Got it? When he answers, ask him if he worked today. If he says no—and I'm sure he will say no because the radio said he was slugged and robbed last night—just ask him who took his place. Nothing more, understand. If he asks you any questions, don't answer him. Hang up, come back here—and maybe we can solve the unsolvable."

Nurse Kelly looked doubtful. "I got it all," she said, "but it doesn't make any sense to me."

"Never mind the sense," Pete said. "That comes later. Just do exactly as I said. Above all, don't get carried away and start jabbering. If I'm wrong about this guy you might be endangering your life. But I'm pretty sure he's not the one who did it."

"Well, okay, but I hope you know what you're doing."

Nurse Kelly went out the door, and vanished down the hallway. Pete closed his eyes. He didn't feel so fine now. Why do I let myself get dragged into these things, he thought.

Time passed. He waited. These days that was all he did—wait . . .

When Nurse Kelly came back, Pete greeted her eagerly. "Did you do what I told you? What did Harry Kermitt say?"

"He sounded like a nice guy," she said. "I agree with you—I don't think he did it. He said he couldn't go to work today, but some guy from the union came around and offered to take his place, so he let him, and was anything wrong."

"And you said no and hung up, I hope."

"That's right. I wish you'd tell me just what we're doing, and why."

"We are solving an impossible murder," said Pete. "Are you ready for the next assignment?"

Nurse Kelly looked doubtful again. "I suppose so," she said. "What do I do now, call the F.B.I.?"

"That won't be necessary. The local authorities should do. Go out, wander around the building, see if you can find somebody from Homicide who will listen to you. It's

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not very late. If I know Lieutenant Hamilton, he's probably still here asking questions. If you find him, tell him Pete Rodney has some information that might help him, and bring him back with you. Unless he's changed a lot, he'll come running."

As Nurse Kelly left on her mission, Pete turned his head and sighed. Thinking can be very tiring—especially to a man in an iron lung, and especially if you are thinking about impossibilities . . .

When Nurse Kelly came back with Lieutenant Hamilton, she looked a little smug. Lieutenant Hamilton, on the other hand, looked somewhat strained. Actually, he didn't care much for private eyes. He never let them sit on his desk, use his phone, or tell him what to do next. He thought they were good for divorce work, for trailing unsuspecting citizens, for guarding not-too-valuable private possessions, and for not much else. Greetings between the two men were not too cordial, but the Lieutenant made a gallant effort.

"Hello, Pete," he said. "Sorry to see you like this. The young lady said you might have some information."

"You might call it that," Pete replied. "If you'd like to wrap this thing up in a hurry, here's what to do. Have the boys pick up a fellow named Harry Kermitt—he's in the phone book. Get a description from him of the man who took over his job today. Take Kermitt down to headquarters and let him look over the mug books. I think he'll find your boy there—probably a free-lance hood who works for a rival organization. You can take it from there."

Lieutenant Hamilton looked at what he could see of Pete for some time. "I hate to seem more stupid than I actually am," he said at length, "but what is this all about? To start with, who the hell is Harry Kermitt?"

Pete sighed. He was very tired. "Harry Kermitt," he said, "is a guy I know. He's a professional—you might almost say, a craftsman. Last night he was slugged and robbed. The robbery was a blind. The slugging was the important part. They wanted him incapacitated for today, and after the slugging he was. When some ape showed up and said he was from the union and had been sent to take Harry's place, Harry said, 'Sure, fine,' or words to that effect. So the ape took Harry's place and did his stuff. And there you are."

"Yes," said Lieutenant Hamilton, "there I am. But if you don't mind, where am I? And once again, *WHO* is Harry Kermitt?"

Pete answered the question with a question. "Lieutenant," he said wearily, "have you ever had a surgical operation?"

Hamilton considered briefly. "Had my appendix out a few years ago," he said. "Why?"

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"Think back, Lieutenant," urged Pete. "What did they do to you before the operation?"

"Well, let's see," said the Lieutenant. "They checked me over, looked to see that I didn't have dentures, gave me some kind of shot that knocked me out before I even got to the operating room. I always wondered what kind of language I used in there."

"I hope it was better than your memory," said Pete, who had had considerable experience with hospitals. "Go back a little further. Who came in to see you a little while before all that?"

The Lieutenant pondered. Had Pete been able to watch Hamilton's face he might almost have seen the light dawn. "Of course! The guy who *shaved* me!"

Pete contrived a light nod. "Of course," he said. "And Harry Kermitt is the man who should have come in this morning to shave The Dutchman, and get him ready for his operation. Only somebody slugged Harry last night, and he didn't feel like working today. So when the guy came around and said he was sent by the union, Harry was only too glad to let him substitute for him."

"That must be the answer," the Lieutenant said. "He came right over here, put on a smock, walked right past everybody who never even noticed him, did his job on The Dutchman, wiped his razor, put it back in the case, and walked out—as invisible as The Invisible Man! Rodney, I've underestimated you. Thanks a million. If you ever get out of that thing and need any help, look me up. My memory is better than you think!"

"Okay, Lieutenant," said Pete, a little bitterly. "I think you're safe enough on that promise. Why don't you go get the guy? I'm tired. And besides, I want to find out if this gorgeous creature knows what's going on."

"Got to keep up the act," he thought. And aloud he said, "Honey, you were marvelous. It's all settled now, so why don't you go tell the girls all about it, and let me get some sleep."

And she did.

And he did.

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Perhaps you will think this story has a strange or unorthodox inner balance —that its proportions are askew. And perhaps you would be right. But— and it's a big "but"—the story also has an irresistible narrative pull. You will simply want to know: What is going to happen to Melton, self-judged murderer and confirmed alcoholic? And we don't think you'll put the story down until you've found out . . .

ONE DRINK CAN KILL YOU

by DAVID ALEXANDER

"THE HIGH PRIEST," MELTON TOLD himself as he watched the doctor shuffling papers. "Now he will render his benediction. He should be wearing robe and mitre instead of an expensively tailored, three-button worsted."

Nothing made much difference to Melton any more. He seemed incapable of experiencing emotion, or reacting to his surroundings or to other people. He thought of himself as an ambulatory dead man.

He had come to the sanitarium after his wife's death for the same reason he had bought the house on an old road near a New England village. It was the easiest thing to do. His friends—the very few he had left from the old days—had prevailed on him to spend a month at Dr. Frazier's hospital because the doctor was supposed to be especially good with alcoholics. He wasn't, of course, Melton thought. He knew no more about alcoholics than alcoholics knew about themselves—and that was precisely nothing.

In a way, Melton did feel something. He was relieved that this was his last day at the sanitarium, his final formal audience with the doctor. He would pretend to listen to Frazier as the doctor made pontifical phrases that were meaningless, really, but were meant to justify his large bill.

Melton admitted he felt a mild sense of elation—or, at least, of relief—because the probing, the senseless questions to which there were no answers, the interminable blood counts, urine analyses, and all the other tribal ceremonies peculiar to the medical priesthood would be ended now in minutes. Then he could drive to the little house in the country that he had bought sight-unseen. He wondered idly what it looked like, although he didn't care much, not really.

The doctor was saying:

". . . remarkably good physical condition for a man well into his forties considering the abuse you've given your body for so many years.

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The heart is strong. The blood pressure has receded almost to normal during your stay here . . ."

(*The systolic reading is down about forty points*, Melton reflected. *This miracle has cost me approximately fifty dollars a point.*)

". . . there is some liver damage, of course. All heavy drinkers develop fatty livers. However, it is not too advanced. It can be controlled with regular injections of B-12. The blood-sugar count was high-normal when you arrived, near the danger point, but there has been no spilling. It is perfectly normal now. Down ten points, to be exact . . ."

(*Two hundred dollars a point,* Melton reckoned wryly.)

". . . all in all, a most encouraging picture, I should say, from the physical standpoint. Good, strong pulse. A quite remarkable digestive system. Normal weight. The duodenum is slightly spastic, but we found no ulcer crater. You should have a long life in front of you, Mr. Melton, and a useful one if you live it wisely . . ."

(*I've paid him two thousand dollars for thirty nights' lodging and ninety meals and X-rays and needles and pills and bright young men with bedside manners asking questions that can't be answered*, Melton thought. *And now he tells me this. I was willing to pay him, eager even, because I had hope. I hoped he would tell me I am dying, that I wouldn't need to find the guts to kill myself. Now he's destroyed even that hope. That's what I've bought myself—the end of hope.*)

". . . your mental condition, your uncooperative attitude, is of most concern to us. Your refusal to try the proven therapy of Alcoholics Anonymous, for instance . . ."

Melton spoke for the first time. "I told you," he said. "I tried it. A long time ago. It didn't work."

"Why didn't it work, Mr. Melton? It has worked for tens of thousands. Have you tried to analyze the reason it didn't work for you?"

"The religious aspect," Melton answered. "The God-angle."

"You don't believe in God?"

"Not in the kind of God that people who go to church believe in. Not the kind of God that keeps AA's sober. I can believe in a power, perhaps, or in a force, if you wish to get semantic. My God makes a great tree grow from a small seed, then sends a hurricane to blow it down. He's a God with a sense of irony, perhaps, but not one who interests himself in the foolish little codes that pious little men call morality."

The doctor shook his head sadly. "And there is this fixation of yours, of course—this insistence that you killed your wife. A guilt complex like that can destroy you, Mr. Melton. It borders on psychosis. We have hardly had time to investigate the cause of it. In so short a period we can deal only with surface matters. Perhaps it might be removed by deep analysis."

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"I have no need for deep analysis," Melton said shortly. "I don't need a Freudian practitioner to apply mythological terms to my guilt. I am a murderer. I killed my wife."

"This is mere masochism, Mr. Melton. You are wallowing in guilt for some perverse motivation of your own. It is a form of mental illness, and it can only lead to the most unpleasant consequences, I assure you. You could not possibly have killed your wife. You had not seen her in months. You were miles from the scene of her death. She was crossing Madison Avenue at the noon hour. The brake fluid in a man's car had leaked out, so that he could not stop for a red light. His car knocked your wife down and she died instantly. There is nothing at all to connect you with her death. The insurance company paid you a large sum without the slightest question, enough to give you at least minimum security for the rest of your life. No suspicion of guilt—none whatever—attached to you. And I don't have to remind you that insurance companies investigate the circumstances of such accidents thoroughly before they pay out such large sums."

"I killed her," Melton repeated stubbornly. "I had a choice two years ago. If I had quit drinking then, she would have stayed with me. We loved each other. But I chose to keep on drinking and she left me. If she had stayed, she would not have been on that corner on that day when that car ran out of brake fluid."

"Nonsense, Mr. Melton! You might as well say that the salesman who sold that particular car was the one who killed your wife, that he is a murderer. If he had not sold that car, the accident would not have occurred."

"No," said Melton. "No. You don't understand at all."

The doctor glanced at his watch and rose from his desk. "There is one thing you must remember despite your stubborn adherence to your own guilt feelings," he said. "You must remind yourself of it every day, several times a day, every hour on the hour. You must remember that one drink can kill you."

The doctor was amazed by the look that came into Melton's face. It was the first time the patient had shown any real emotional reaction. Oddly enough, it was not a look of fear, or even of concern. It was a look of pure, almost holy exaltation.

"Do you mean that, Doctor?" Melton asked. "Do you really mean it?"

The patient's unexpected reaction unsettled Dr. Frazier. His world of science was a well-ordered realm of stimulus and response, of premeditated cause and anticipated effect. Melton was not playing the game. His reaction was all wrong, and the doctor was at a complete loss to explain the look on his patient's face, the eager question he had

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asked, as if Melton were begging for confirmation of a dreadful diagnosis.

The doctor chose his words carefully. "I am not speaking literally, of course," he said. "No one quite understands the anatomy and psyche of alcoholism. In cases like yours we do not know for sure what peculiar chemistry an ounce of alcohol sets up in the body, what overwhelming compulsion it engenders in the mind. We do know the first ounce opens the floodgates, that its effects are as predictable as the effects of the potion that Dr. Jekyll swallowed.

"You were very close to a stroke when you arrived here. You would certainly have suffered a stroke had you continued to drink, and the stroke most probably would have killed you. It can happen again. It *will* happen again if you continue to drink. The first drink may not actually kill you, of course. It may be the hundredth or the thousandth—but if you take the first drink, it will inevitably lead to the fatal dose. That is why I am stating a positive fact when I say that one drink can kill you."

"Thank you, Doctor," said Melton warmly. "Thank you very much." He started for the door.

The doctor was disturbed by Melton's mood. Suddenly the patient seemed to have emerged from an almost cataleptic state into one that bordered on euphoria.

"Mr. Melton," the doctor called, "you must try to believe in something. All of us must believe in something. In life. In ourselves, if nothing else. You say you cannot believe in an orthodox God, but you must try to believe in *something*, Mr. Melton."

Melton turned and actually smiled at Dr. Frazier.

"I believe in something," he declared. "I believe in something now."

Five years before, Tom Melton had been a good newspaperman, one of the best and one of the highest paid. His column about politics and foreign affairs was syndicated by the most respected newspapers and was widely quoted. It was read by Presidents and Senators and the heads of foreign states.

He had drunk all his adult life. He had even considered whiskey to be his greatest friend during his days as a war correspondent, for he had hated the senseless killing, the unremitting horrors of the time, and he had found his only refuge from unbearable tensions in a bottle. But he had continued to function brilliantly. The war he hated had made him famous.

When the horrors ended, the bottle was still there—a part of him like his typewriter and his English raincoat and the sweat-stained hat his wife always wanted to throw away. He had no idea of when or how it had happened. There seemed to be no specific point in time when

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he had ceased to be merely a drinker, like scores of other men in his profession, and had become a hopeless alcoholic. Twice his column had contained disastrous inaccuracies. The first time, the desk had caught his reckless and unfounded statements in time and the piece had been killed. The second time, the libel had been printed and his paper had paid a fortune in damages without even going to court.

They had retained him on the staff because in those days his name was still big, his following still large. His reaction to disaster and near-disgrace was simply to drink more. Now fear came into his life and ruled it. Bottled courage was not enough. His writing had once been challenging, lucid, keenly analytical. Now he feared another mistake and his columns became inoffensive, dull, lifeless. There were complaints. Readers wrote to the editor. Newspapers throughout the country cancelled his syndicated column.

Melton drank more heavily.

The final crackup had come two years ago. Melton was a big man and a gentle one. He hated violence. The war had given him a bellyful of that, and he could no longer even hunt wild things as he had once done during vacations in the North Woods. He could not stand the thought of killing. Yet one night in some gin mill he had never frequented before, he fought and almost killed a smaller man as a result of a foolish, drunken argument.

Melton had been arrested and jailed. Newspapers throughout the country spread the story over their front pages. His own paper had kept the matter out of court by paying off the small man who had suffered contusions, lacerations, and a broken arm. But Melton was through.

He could not explain the thing that had happened to him. He had thought he was happy. He loved his wife. He was glad he had no children because he thought another and even more awful carnage was coming. Certainly he had been comfortable and financially independent. He had had status and recognition. Yet shortly before his wife's death had shocked him into sobriety of a sort, he had been washing dishes in a Bowery cafeteria and sneaking drinks from a bottle of cooking wine whenever the boss's back was turned.

His wife had given him the choice two years before. He had gone from job to job, each worse and lower paid than the last, but that was not the reason for the choice he had to make.

His wife could stand poverty. But she could not stand the thing he had become.

Against his will, against all the instincts that had motivated him for a lifetime, he made his choice, and he chose the bottle.

His wife never applied for a divorce, hoping, perhaps, that time would bring a miracle. She merely left him. She returned to the ad-

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vertising agency she had worked for when she married him fourteen years before, and began to live her own life in her own sane world.

Melton sank completely into his own insane existence—the terrifying, haunted realm of the alcoholic. He was no longer employable, and he knew it, and did not even seek a job. His savings were soon gone and he supported himself after a fashion by writing pieces under another name for lurid magazines. In time, he could no longer write even such hack stuff as this, and he pawned his typewriter.

He lived in rooming houses and cheap hotels and he was on skid row when his friends found him to tell him that his wife was dead.

He knew at once that he had murdered her. He had murdered her the moment he had made his choice.

When he realized that his wife was dead, he became suddenly and sickeningly sober, for even drinking had lost all meaning for him. Only one thing held meaning for him now—death. He knew that men who took their lives were not cowards. They possessed a grim moral courage that he completely lacked. He had tried to commit suicide before, and he had failed at the final moment to swallow the required number of pills or to slash his wrists deeply enough.

Now he prayed to his own God to let the ravages of drink kill him. He had heard it was often fatal for a drunkard to be suddenly deprived of alcohol. He might suffer convulsions or a stroke and die horribly. He was a murderer, and he wanted punishment—but most of all he wanted the great dark nothingness of death.

That was why it was easy for his few remaining friends to persuade him to go to Dr. Frazier's sanitarium "to rest and recuperate from the shock." He did not go to be cured. He went to be condemned. The pains in his body and the sickness in his soul made him think he might be dying, and he wanted to be assured that he would not have to endure life much longer.

There was plenty of money for the sanitarium, of course. The adjuster for the casualty company which had insured the car that had killed his wife virtually pressed a check for a huge amount on Melton, for he feared the extravagant awards juries were making in such cases whenever they got to court. Melton did not want the money. It was blood money. It was a murderer's reward.

But his wife had no living relatives, and he could see no point in increasing the corporate assets of an insurance company by refusing to take it. Perhaps, he thought, he could find some good way of spending it before he died. If his wife had died of cancer or heart disease, the problem would have been simple: he would have made a gift to one of the medical research foundations. But there was no foundation to pre-

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vent brake fluid from leaking out of a car.

He spent some of the money. He paid $2000 to the sanitarium and a thousand or so more for a second-hand station wagon and several thousands more as a down payment on Bert Grayson's little house that stood remote beside a rutted dirt road in a thinly populated section of New England. Bert and his wife Ethel had used the house as a summer retreat and sometimes they had gone there for what they called a Grandma Moses Christmas.

But Bert had just been transferred to the Paris bureau of the same paper for which Melton once had worked, and he wanted to get rid of the house, completely furnished. He thought it would be a fine place for Melton to live while he tried to pull the threads of his life together again. He said Melton could finally write the book he had been planning for so many years. Melton himself thought that Bert, who had been kind when most of the others had forgotten him, could use the money—and that the house would be as good a place as any in which to die.

Now that Melton had been condemned to live he had no thought of writing a book. He did intend to do more of the hack writing he had done before, for he knew the markets and he could earn enough to support himself modestly in the little house. He did not wish to make further use of the blood money. In time, he thought, he would devise some fitting way of ridding himself of it . . .

Melton reached the house late on an early autumn afternoon. Rain began to fall as he turned off the highway onto the dirt road and he remembered that Bert had said the road often became impassable in mud or snow.

The house was at least a century old, a New England saltbox with clapboards silvered by generations of rain and snow and sun. Melton passed a ruined barn and a vine-grown smokehouse on the road, but there was no other structure of any kind in sight. At this gray hour, when rain fell softly, the little house with silvered shingles seemed bleak and pathetically alone.

Melton had his clothing and meager personal possessions packed in a single suitcase. His only other baggage was a portable typewriter, but the rear of the station wagon was filled with cartons containing his books. His wife had taken the furniture and pictures and rugs and books when they had separated because he could no longer afford to live in the gracious apartment they had occupied so long, nor did he wish to live there. When she died, Melton had given everything but the books to the Salvation Army. He had thought the books might prove a mild antidote to the pain of existence if he were condemned to live.

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He steered the car up the gravel driveway and into a garage that was a converted woodshed. He unloaded the car and presently he found the key and unlocked the door of his little house.

As he switched on lamps, the house seemed to greet him with an uncertain smile—like that of a timid child who meets a stranger.

This was northern New England and despite the fact that summer had barely passed, the rain had made the empty house damp and chilly. He lighted the oil heater in the kitchen, then piled logs in the fireplace and nursed them to flame.

Bert and Ethel had been there very recently and had made the place habitable for him. It was scrubbed and shining. They had even left the phone connected. Ethel had bought captain's chairs and rockers and old pine tables at country auctions when she originally furnished the place. A set of Currier and Ives prints in wormy frames hung on the walls beside a naive sampler that some Victorian maiden had stitched to pass the winter evenings.

There were hooked rugs on the wide-board floors. There was fresh linen under a crazy quilt on the bed upstairs, and clean towels hung in the bathroom, and chintzy curtains, freshly laundered, covered all the windows. They had left food in the refrigerator and on the cupboard shelves, knowing he would forget to buy supplies en route. There were even partially filled containers of washing powders and detergents and weed killer and insecticide stacked neatly beside the gaily checked tea towels.

They had wanted a man condemned to life to feel comfortable and at home, he thought bitterly. After he put away his clothes and placed his books on the shelves beside the fireplace, he sat down by the fire and suddenly a sense of guilt assailed him because he felt strangely peaceful, and peace should be forbidden a man like him.

That night he slept well and long and he did not take one of the green capsules they had given him when he left the sanitarium.

When he awakened to a sun-drenched morning he knew guilt again, for he was refreshed and a sense of physical well-being flowed through him, and he felt strongly that such pleasant sensations should be denied a drunkard who had killed his wife.

As the New England autumn flamed from red to gold and finally burned itself to brittle parchment-brown, Melton developed small routines, and they became his way of life.

He arose and bathed and shaved and cooked his breakfast. Then he cleaned his house and made what repairs were needed, for he had always been handy with tools. After that, he devoted a few hours to his writing and most of what he wrote eventually found a publisher and brought

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in the few dollars that were enough for his modest needs.

At nights he sat by the fire and read old books. Most of them were novels that had excited him when he was a boy, for unconsciously he sought to make the impossible journey back to his age of innocence and hope. He rode to Paris on d'Artagnan's buttercup-hued pony, and shivered with Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn in the cave of Injun Joe, and wept for Sidney Carton on the guillotine, and climbed worn steps to an ancient tower with David Balfour on a storm-wild night.

He read late into the night, until his eyes were burning and the last log split and sputtered out. Fear and guilt were always there, just below the level of his consciousness. He walked always on the edge of darkness but the path he trod grew familiar to him. He was like a man who lives beside a dark and fetid swamp where primeval nightmare creatures lurk in silence. He kept his mind and his eyes on the narrow path he walked and was careful not to plunge into the sucking horrors that he knew were waiting if his step should falter.

He lived almost entirely alone. Sometimes the rural delivery carrier stopped by to leave a card from Bert in Paris or a check from some publisher of an unimportant magazine. Sometimes he went to the little village called Bryceville, two miles away, which had hardly changed since the days when old Sam Adams had blustered about the countryside preaching sedition and mustering troops to fight the tyrant king.

He bought his supplies at Larkin's General Store and got to know Will Larkin, who was both the storekeeper and the local sheriff. In time, he also met the village doctor, an old man named Chisholm, who wore half-moon glasses and a shiny serge suit that was always dusted with dandruff from his thinning hair. He could not explain why he went to the doctor for the B-12 shots that Frazier had prescribed. He wondered vaguely if he had begun to want to live again.

But he dwelt always on the borderland of fear.

When Halloween came, it was a proper day for witches. Wind gusted and it was the breath of winter. The wind played unearthly music that stirred the dry and withered leaves to flutter in a funeral dance. It rattled the bare and bony branches of the trees and it shook the little house angrily, as a malevolent scold might shake a frightened child.

Fittingly enough, it was on this day of goblins that the panic he had been expecting and had so far managed to avoid finally gripped him. The creatures of the dark place had surfaced at last and they watched him with their lizard-lidded eyes, sublimely sure of their final triumph.

His body shook and he wanted

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desperately to scream. He remembered Dr. Frazier's words: *One drink can kill you.*

A drink, he thought. I'll have a drink and that will be the end of it—the end of a man who made his choice and killed his wife.

It was then he realized how utterly vulnerable he had left himself. There was no drink in the house. New Englanders are individualists and their counties and towns are individualistic in their liquor laws. You could not obtain a drink or a bottle in the village of Bryceville. He would have to drive thirty miles to the mill city of Walton.

He ran from the house without a coat or hat, heedless of the knife-cold, gale-force wind. He started his car and it bumped over the ruts and ridges of the old dirt road. At Bryceville he turned off onto the paved highway, and the wind was behind him, a devil's lash that sped him on. The force of the wind rocked the heavy station wagon, but he drove steadily and fast, a man possessed with a purpose.

Like so many New England mill cities, Walton was a depressing spectacle. It had become virtually a ghost town. The woolen-makers long ago had moved south where they could obtain cheaper labor. The high brick walls of deserted mills stood brooding vacantly, their black and broken windows sightless eyes. Men and women shuffled over the streets that had been littered by the wind. Like Melton, they seemed hopeless as they braced themselves against the gale.

It was now mid-afternoon, but there was no sun and the business houses had turned on their neon signs. Many of the twisted tubes spelled *BAR*. Men without hope spend all they have for whiskey, Melton thought.

He found a package store and parked his car in front of it. The first thing he saw inside was a fancy package containing three ornate decanters of a fine bourbon he had once preferred. The three bottles were offered as a special at a ridiculously low price. Melton doubted that many people in the town could afford so expensive a brand. The fancy gift package had probably been standing on the shelves since the previous Christmas.

He bought it and took it to the car and placed it on the seat beside him.

Suddenly he was calm again—not happy or contented, but grimly calm. His weapon was beside him. The monsters of the dismal swamp had submerged again to the darker depths. When they reappeared, he would be armed against them; he would know what to do.

One drink can kill you.

As if according to his mood, the wild wind died. He drove slowly and carefully back to the little house he had left deserted and unlocked.

He carried his package into the kitchen. He uncorked one of the three bottles and poured a small

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amount of whiskey from it. He did not pour it into a glass. He poured it down the drain in the sink.

He repeated the process with the other two bottles. Then he went through a small ceremony that took several minutes. When he was finished, he recorked the bottles and found a roll of cellophane tape and sealed them. He placed the three bottles on a shelf of the cupboard, side by side.

They seemed to wink at him as the lamp glinted on them. They were plump and benign, like oriental household gods squatting in their small shrine. My winking, girthy gods, he thought. They will protect me. Now I am secure.

He found a padlock and a key in a chest of tools. He attached the padlock to the cupboard door and snapped it shut. A man's household gods are private deities. He does not want intruders to place their hands upon them.

After that his life resumed its normal routine. He worked and ate and slept. Occasionally he would unlock the door of the small shrine in the kitchen and smile almost contentedly at his girthy gods. They winked back reassuringly.

By mid-November, when the foliage from the trees was soft, deep leaf-mold on the frosted earth, and the skies were pale with the ghostly touch of winter, he had finished most of the books on his shelves. He had just reread John Buchan's tales of adventure and intrigue and he had discovered that the cloak-and-dagger literature of escape held a strong appeal for him. That was when he went to the Joshua Bryce Memorial Library and made a friend. The library was a remarkable place and the librarian was a remarkable person.

A latter-day Bryce had made windfall profits selling Army uniforms to the government during the first World War and he had sought to honor his ancestor who had founded the village by endowing the library. Its endowment was far more than that of libraries in towns many times the size of Bryceville, and Miss Amelia Abbott, who had been the librarian for forty years, had made good use of the money. Its fine collection of books was housed in a gracious old building of native stone. Its reading room was a pleasant retreat where a coal fire crackled in the grate and silk-shaded lamps cast rosy light. Even the stern, steel-engraved faces of New England poets and long-dead Bryces that stared down from the pastel walls did not detract from the room's chintzy comfort.

Miss Amelia herself reminded Melton of a small gray squirrel. She was a slight, fragile-looking woman of 75, but her eyes were bright and they darted about with the inquisitiveness of a child's and seemed to take pleasure from everything they saw. She was delighted to have a new reader and to learn that Melton shared her own delight in sus-

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pense romances. She loaded him down with books by Eric Ambler and Geoffrey Household and Manning Coles, then she insisted that he must stay for tea in the reading room, a pleasant four o'clock custom she had inaugurated years before.

Melton went back for books and tea every few days after that. He came to know Miss Amelia well and he felt more at ease with her than he had ever felt with any human being except his wife.

Later he began to visit her in her small, neat cottage on Sunday afternoons and finally he invited her to his house for an evening meal.

Mis Amelia was something of a local heroine as well as a village institution. As his friendship with her ripened Melton's own horizons widened. Miss Amelia had doubtless spoken of him to other villagers who had kept their distance in the past because they sensed he wanted it that way. Until his arrival, Miss Amelia, who had written a privately printed history of Bryceville, had been the town's only literary light.

Now Melton found that even the potboilers he was turning out for cheap magazines gave him a certain status in the village. Old Dr. Chisholm invited him on a hunting trip. He refused, because he could not stand the thought of killing, but he was almost foolishly grateful for the invitation. Will Larkin, the sheriff and storekeeper, drove to his house one day and presented him with a six-months-old pup ironically named Popeye after the muscular comic-strip character because he'd been the runt of the litter.

"He ain't pedigreed," Larkin said. "He's just plain dog. Doubt he'll be worth a damn to you scaring off burglars, but he'll be company. Real friendly little cuss."

Melton wanted to refuse the gift but the pup was snuffing at his trousers and wagging its stubby tail and looking up at him with beseeching eyes, and he felt the gruff Larkin might be offended if he disdained the gift. He had not wanted the pup, partly because he did not want responsibility of any sort, partly because he felt it might grow sick and die, since he had destroyed all the things he ever loved or valued. But he came to love the pup in no time at all, and now he had a deep affection for two things—the frisky young pup and the sprightly old lady. He had not believed that could happen.

One night Miss Amelia drove out to see him in her Ford coupé that was old enough to be valued by a collector, and as they sat by the fire he impetuously did something else he had never thought he could do. He told her of himself—all of it.

He told her of his drunkenness and his despair and of his wife and how he had murdered her when he had made the choice. He told her of the dark place in his mind and how the fearful, lizard-lidded monsters were waiting there for him, menac-

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ingly silent, knowing that their time would surely come.

He told her of the panic he had felt and of the bottles he had bought and of the insane little ceremony he had performed before placing them in their household shrine and locking them away from the eyes and hands of strangers. He even showed her where he kept the key to the little shrine.

When he finished his story, Miss Amelia's eyes were misty, but she smiled at him. "You are not evil," she declared. "You could never have murdered your wife. You are a fine and gentle young man. I know you better than you know yourself. Why, Fred Chisholm told me you wouldn't even go out with him to kill rabbits!"

She tried to comfort him. She accused herself of small meannesses and selfishness and then she confessed the one scarlet sin in her blameless life. Soon after she was graduated from college—a very proper New England woman's college—she had gone to New York to visit a former schoolmate who played small parts in the theater. She had met a "fast" set of people and she had been fascinated by them. Her father was a strict man, an ardent prohibitionist, and she had never tasted an alcoholic beverage. One night she and her friend and their escorts had eaten in a small, candlelit Italian restaurant in Greenwich Village, and there had been wine and she had drunk it and gotten disgracefully "tiddly," she said.

"It was such wonderful wine! Such a beautiful bottle, all wrapped in straw. I've often wondered what it was."

He smiled and told her it had been Chianti.

He agreed to have Christmas dinner at her house, for she lived utterly alone, as he did. A few days before Christmas he drove again to the liquor store in Walton and he was delighted to find a huge plump bottle of Chianti weskited in straw—a whole jeroboam. He bought it and when he gave it to her on Christmas day she was delighted.

"I can stay tiddly for the rest of my life!" she exclaimed ecstatically. "And when it's gone, I'll make a lamp of the lovely bottle."

The months passed and Popeye the pup grew and became an increasingly delightful nuisance. When spring came, Melton made a ridiculously inept attempt to grow roses and when he failed, he wrote an amusing piece about his bachelor gardening and sold it to an important Sunday magazine that paid its writers well. He was amazed to find he had rediscovered a sense of humor.

Miss Amelia taught him to grow flowers and to make a rock garden of small and colorful shrubs. They saw each other almost every day now. The pup took to sleeping across his legs at night. After the wasted years he was close to warm and human things again.

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Yet he knew that he was existing in a fool's contentment. The world was full of vileness, and evil and violence were sure to seek him out in the end. He did not know what form they would take. It might come as drunkenness or madness or suicide—but it would come, he was sure of that. He devoutly hoped the evil and violence would not intrude on the tranquil twilight of Miss Amelia's life, too.

It was summer when the thing he feared finally arrived.

The evil was human.

It was a summer evening, fretful with lightning and querulous with the growl of thunder. Despite the threatening weather that might turn the old road into an impassable morass once the rain came, Miss Amelia had driven her ancient Ford to Melton's little house. She had just read a new thriller by an English author and she wanted him to have the book at once. She stayed for dinner.

As they were washing the dishes, the storm broke. Water cascaded from the roof in torrents and Miss Amelia exclaimed, "Oh, my! I'll be compromised for sure now. My old car can never make it back if this keeps up. I'm already marked as the town tippler because of that enormous bottle of wine you gave me, and now they'll think I'm a loose woman as well if I have to stay overnight at a man's house."

Melton walked to the living room and switched on the radio for a weather report. A newscaster was hoarsely hysterical with tidings of a bank robbery in Boston. Three men wearing rubber masks had entered the bank and killed three people, one of them an elderly guard, another a teller who managed to set off an alarm. The third victim was a teen-age girl who had been drawing money from her savings account to purchase a new dance frock for her vacation; one of the robbers had fired a wild shot that had ricocheted and killed her instantly.

The newscaster gave details of description. One robber was fat, another tall and very thin, the third barely jockey-sized. The three wanted men had thus far eluded pursuit, but they were believed to be penetrating farther and farther north into New England. Road blocks had been set up on all the major highways, and it was thought the criminals were proceeding by a network of seldom used country roads.

"If they try this one they won't get far," Miss Amelia commented. "They'll be mired down in no time at all."

The rain fell harder and, of course, the storm was at its most torrential when the perverse Popeye whined and scratched urgently at the front door.

Melton sighed resignedly and opened the door. Popeye hesitated a moment, offended by the down-

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pour, but the needs of nature overcame his reluctance and he scuttled out into the yard.

At that moment there was a sound of squealing brakes, and headlights made a wild circling pattern as they came round a curve in the road. A car skidded, crashed through the rail fence of the yard, and finally stopped within a few feet of the frightened and bristling pup.

The car door flew open as it jolted to a stop and a tall, thin man jackknifed out of it. He moved forward and the headlights picked him out. He had a gun in his hand. Behind him two other men got out of the car: one was fat, the other was as small as a jockey.

Popeye went yapping at the man with the gun. Before Melton could call the dog back, the gun exploded. The bullet blew the pup a foot in the air. Then he lay on the ground and quivered once and his blood flowed into the soft mud.

The shot brought Miss Amelia to the door. "What's wrong? What's wrong?" she screamed.

The thin man advanced toward Melton, stuck the gun in his belly. He shoved Melton back and hit him a vicious, back-handed blow across the face. Melton staggered against Miss Amelia, almost knocking her down.

The jockey-sized man was examining the damage to the car. Presently he reached inside and switched off the headlights

"Inside," the thin man ordered. He followed Miss Amelia and the dazed Melton into the house and the fat man came in behind him. The eyes of the two men darted about the softly lighted room. The tall man was scarecrow-thin and obviously very sick. His face was dirty-gray and there were crinkled yellow splotches like chicken-skin beneath his eyes. He began to cough convulsively.

The fat man had thick moist lips and very small eyes with reddened lids. He looked at his companion disapprovingly.

"You and that damned cough," he said. "You damned near queered it in the bank with that stinking cough of yours. You started coughing and that's why your shot went wild and killed the girl. Why the hell don't you buy some cough drops?"

The fat man saw the telephone. He walked to it and gripped the cord in a meaty paw. He was about to pull the cord from the wall connection when the jockey-sized man entered, dripping water on the floor.

"Don't do that, Pete!" he called in alarm. "We gotta have the phone. We gotta call Charley or we're stuck here forever. Our axle's broke and we won't get far in that old heap in the yard. You see it? It belongs in one of them museums. Charley's gotta send us another car —he's just gotta."

They had seen Miss Amelia's ancient coupé in the driveway and

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had not realized there was another car in the garage.

The man called Pete nodded to the small man and released his grip on the telephone cord. "Upstairs," he said. "Search the joint. See if there's anybody but this jerk and the old bag here."

The small man scampered up the stairs, still dripping water.

Presently he returned. He searched the kitchen. Then he came back into the living room. He shook his head, and said, "Nobody. But we're up the creek without a paddle just the same. Charley can't make it up this road tonight. Nothing could make it in that mud. Not even a tank."

The thin man said, "You worry too much. The sun will dry the road out enough by tomorrow and Charley can come and pick us up. This is as good a place as any to spend the night. Remember, if Charley can't make it, the cops can't either. They can't tie the car to us. And nobody saw our faces in the bank. We had the masks."

The small man nodded toward Melton and Miss Amelia.

"They seen us," he said.

The thin man made a sound that was half laugh and half cough.

"They won't be talking to anybody," he said grimly.

Miss Amelia stood straight and proud, facing them defiantly, her eyes contemptuous.

Melton, still numbed by the blow, had sunk down into a chair, his head lowered. It had come at last. He knew he should have shunned human beings, because he carried the plague of disaster with him. He had murdered his wife. He had destroyed everything that loved him—even the little pup had met a brutal death because of him. And now Miss Amelia, who had lived a long, long span of quiet and peaceful years, would end them violently and horribly.

Because of him.

Miss Amelia said, "You're going to kill us, aren't you?"

The fat man laughed unpleasantly. "Now there's a real smart old broad," he said. "But don't worry, grandma. It won't hardly hurt at all. It'll be just like with the dog. You didn't even hear him holler, did you?"

The short man seemed very young and at the same time very old. His wizened face was that of an evil child. He said plaintively, "I'm hungry. We ain't eat since breakfast. Why not make the old bag cook us some supper, Pete? They ain't no use in chilling her before we eat."

The fat man said, "He's hungry, grandma. You hear that? He's a growing boy and he wants to eat."

The thin tall man coughed and said, "I want a drink. I need some whiskey."

Melton jerked erect, suddenly tense.

One drink can kill you.

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He wet his dry mouth, tried to speak, but no sound came out. His head ached unbearably and it was hard to think.

Miss Amelia, incredibly, was speaking almost cheerfully. Her face was strangely bright.

"There's plenty of whiskey in the house if that's what you want. Three bottles of fine bourbon. My nephew here locks it up and he hides the key, but I know where it is."

"Well, now," said the fat man grinning. "You just get that key, grandma. We're soaking wet and my friend here's got a cough."

Miss Amelia shook her head vigorously. "No," she said. "I won't get the key unless you promise something."

"You trying to bribe us with a drink for not chilling you, grandma?" Pete asked, amused.

"No," said Miss Amelia. "I'm reconciled to the fact that I'm going to die. I want you to promise you won't let my nephew have a drink if I get the whiskey. He's sick. He's an alcoholic and he shouldn't touch a drop."

The fat man threw back his head and roared with laughter. "This old doll is a real card!" he exclaimed. "She wants her nephew to die without no liquor on his breath! You get that key, grandma. Quick. Then you can start cooking us some supper—something nice and tasty."

Miss Amelia crossed to the mantelpiece and picked up a china Staffordshire dog. A small key was beneath it. She walked calmly to the kitchen, the fat man following closely, still grinning. Miss Amelia opened the cupboard and the three girthy glass gods winked amiably at them.

"Say, now, this is something," said Pete, grasping one of the bottles in a fat fist. "Bonded stuff—the McCoy."

He plunged the fingers of his other hand into three tumblers that were on the sink and returned to the living room. He set the glasses on the pine table. He twisted the cap and seal from the bottle. He poured each of the water glasses half full of bourbon.

"Remember, now," Miss Amelia warned. "You mustn't give my nephew a drink, no matter how much he begs. Not a single drop."

Melton watched them, fascinated.

The three men picked up the glasses.

"Bottoms up," the fat man said greedily.

They put the glasses to their lips and drank.

They had called Sheriff Larkin and, miraculously, he had managed to get his Jeep over the mired dirt road. He had brought along Doc Chisholm, who was also the local coroner.

The three bodies were decently covered now by clean sheets that Miss Amelia had brought from a linen closet.

"I don't get it at all," the sheriff

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said to Melton. "You say you poured weed killer into the three bottles of booze months ago. Why in tarnation would you ruin good drinking whiskey that way, man? Were you expecting something like this to happen sometime?"

Melton shook his head. "No, I wasn't expecting that," he said.

"Then why?"

"Because a man has to believe in something," Melton said.

"Just what did you believe in to make you do a thing like that?"

"In a doctor. In something he told me."

"And just what *did* this doctor tell you?" Doc Chisholm asked.

"He told me one drink can kill you," Melton answered softly.

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DEATH AND THE SKYLARK

by ROY HUGGINS

(*Continued from page 34*)

Glen Clarence Callister was buried at sea. ". . . We, therefore, commit this body to the deep to be turned into corruption, looking for the resurrection of the body when the sea shall give up her dead and the life of the world to come . . ."

Owen Madden read the words in an awkward tempo, but with quiet conviction. Eilene cried silently, but with copious great tears, while Betty stood by with taut face and eyes as dry and hot as desert stones.

For two days Eilene and Owen closeted themselves from time to time in the master's cabin, and quarreled. Their voices were low and guarded, but the passion and the pleading somehow carried even though the words did not.

On the last day before we made port the quarreling stopped, completely, as if with the turning of a switch. It was late afternoon and I was at the wheel when I realized I had heard nothing from them for the entire day.

The *Skylark* was in her Sunday best, and I sat there smoking and listening to her speak. The last time she had moved through the water this way, throwing up foam at her bow, Callister had said she was carrying a bone in her teeth. She was carrying it with a vengeance today, as if she had scented the slips at Oahu.

There was a sound from below, and I knew Betty would be coming up in a moment to take over, and I would be seeing her for the first time that day. Whatever she was required to do, Betty Callister did, but the rest of the time she stayed in her cabin, the door locked. When you knocked, she answered. When you told her you just wanted to talk, she answered with silence.

Her steps sounded on the companionway and in a moment she walked out onto the deck and came over to the cockpit. She stepped down into it and stood there waiting for me to get up.

"Sit down," I said.

She sat down and I got out my cigarettes and offered her one. She shook her head and I lit one from the one in my mouth, snapped the butt away, and blew smoke over my left shoulder.

"Did you want to say something?" she asked quietly.

"Only that the longer you let a thing like this ride you, the longer it takes to get clear of it."

"Dad's dead, and there's nothing I can do to bring him back. I'm not letting it ride me."

"That's good."

There was another silence and I was wondering how to get past it when Betty said, "I just can't stand being on this boat with her, that's all. If I don't stay in my room, I—I don't know what I might do."

"You're sure it's Eilene now, huh?"

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"Of course. Why else would she cook up that business about Dad's will?"

"Maybe it's the truth—that is, the part about the will."

"I hope so. But he didn't tell me about it."

"Maybe she said it just to protect Owen."

"Then they're both in it."

"I doubt it."

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Okay," I said, "but I've been curious about something. Didn't you hear the shot?"

"How could I when there was a silencer on the gun?"

"How did you know that?"

She looked at me steadily for a moment and said, just as steadily, "Because I saw the gun when Owen brought it below."

"I just wondered if Owen had gone out of his way to tell you."

"I don't think that's what you were wondering at all. I think you believe Eilene. She hasn't drawn an honest breath for fifteen years, but you believed her."

"Are you saying I think *you* killed your father?"

She turned and faced me, drawing a sharp breath to say something, and suddenly changed her mind. I could see the pale drawn tension in her face now, the terrible loneliness in her eyes.

She turned away again and said, "It's time for me to take over."

"Okay, you've taken over."

"Please, I . . ." And then, for what was possibly the first time since sudden death had overtaken Glen Callister, his daughter began to cry.

I sat there for a bit before I put a tentative hand to her shoulder. She didn't draw away, and when she spoke, the words were muffled. She said, "Please. Go below. I'll be all right."

And it was plain enough that Betty meant just that. I went below.

Eilene and Owen were both in the lounge. Eilene was mixing a drink, Owen was picking at his guitar, and the tension in the room was even more obvious than the silence.

I stepped over to the bar and poured myself a glass of ice water, sat down with it, and looked up at Eilene. She turned and walked out of the room, and in a moment her stateroom door closed with sharp emphasis.

I glanced at Owen and said, "Seems upset. Anything I can do?"

He told me exactly what I could do.

After another round of silence he shot his fingers across the strings with a discordant whang of sound and tossed the guitar across the room. It landed safely on the other couch. "Gimme a cigarette, will you?"

I gave him a cigarette and watched him light it. He dragged deeply, pulled some of the smoke into his lungs, then blew it out quickly in a white plume.

"What happens when we hit port?" he asked: "Who does what to who?"

"I thought you knew all about sea law."

"Okay, so I don't," he growled.

"The *Skylark*'s an American-registered ship, isn't she?"

"Sure."

"The F.B.I. handles the investigation and the U. S. Attorney in Honolulu tries the case."

"Why? Why not the local authorities?"

"Did it happen locally?"

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"Who do they try? All four of us?"

"Just the guilty party."

"And who might that be?"

"Don't you know?"

He scowled at the cigarette, stood up, and walked to the bar to put it out. He stood there with his back to me for what seemed a long time, and then he wheeled abruptly.

"Bailey, I'm in love with her. I suppose that makes me a prime heel, but there it is. I'm in love with her, and there's nothing I can do about it."

He was staring down at me with a wide-open look of confusion and despair, and I found myself wondering at the changes that can come over a man, or a face. The raw toughness and the maturity of two days ago had fallen away, and once again Owen Madden's face belonged to a kid not long past twenty.

"I'm in love with her and she knows it," he was saying. "Why won't she admit it to me?"

"Admit what?" I asked, and I could feel my lips getting dry as I waited for his answer.

He blinked once and looked down at me as if I had just reminded him of something important. He turned and began to mix himself a drink. His hands were trembling.

I got up and shut the door that led to the passage and stepped over to mix a drink for myself, being careful to keep it reasonably nonalcoholic.

Two hours later I was on my eighth drink and cold sober. Owen was on his ninth, and just cold. He had taken on the erect, slow-moving, studied air of a man who likes to think of himself as blessed with an unlimited capacity. As Owen had put it while working on drink number seven, "I can get canned to the crow's-nest and y'd never know it."

Well, he was canned to the crow's-nest and carrying three red lights, but I still hadn't managed to get him back onto the subject. I was about to give up out of sheer caution—after all, he would have to take us into port in the morning—when suddenly he leaned toward me and said, as if we'd been there all evening. "Sure, it made me sick inside at first, knowing she could kill a man like that. But I don't care now. Don't care about anything but Eilene 'cause I'm in love with her and wanta . . . An' she's in love with me."

He took an untidy swallow and got lost in his thoughts for a while. This time I didn't try to steer him anywhere at all.

"But why won' she admit, huh, Bailey? Can't live with a woman something like that between you. Can you now?"

"Course not. Won't she admit it?"

He shook his head miserably. "Fact, she keeps yapping at me to admit I did it myself. Can you beat that?"

I said, trying to make it sound as casual as asking for a match, "And did you do it?"

His eyes opened a little wider and almost focused on me. "Hell, no, *she* did! Tha's what I been trying tell you. And I don' care! If she'd only tell me!" He was shouting now. "If she just look at me and say, 'Yes, I did it. For you.' Then it—"

He broke off abruptly as the door slammed open behind me. I turned to see Eilene standing there in what must have been her flimsiest. She was glaring hotly across the room at Owen, her neck corded with tension, her fists clenched.

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And when she spoke the sound was like a file against an edge of glass: "You filthy coward. You filthy, lying, murdering coward. I *could* have killed him, Owen. For you. Now I wouldn't walk across the room for you. Not if you were dying. I hope you hang for what you did!"

She turned and went back to her stateroom, leaving Owen staring blankly at the empty darkness framed by the doorway. And she left me seeing the answer to everything, clearly, completely.

It was mid-morning of the fifteenth day of the *Skylark*'s singular journey when Diamond Head hove into view.

I found an American flag in the chartroom and took it up on deck. Owen was at the wheel.

"I'm going to run it up," I said. "Upside down, so we'll get the quarantine officers out here before we hit port. Any objections, Captain?"

"Nope."

I ran the flag up in distress signal position and Owen eyed the operation silently. "Is the gun still aboard," I said, "or did you bury it with the captain?"

"It's aboard."

"Where?"

"Wrapped in a sheet and put away."

"Wrapped . . . Brother, they're going to love you. If there were ever any fingerprints, they're gone now."

He made some kind of answer to that, but I didn't hear it. I had to talk to Betty and time was running out.

It was to be my show from here on, but I can't say that my heart was really in it. Glen Callister had hired me, had paid me five hundred honest dollars, and I hadn't succeeded in talking myself out of the idea that I owed him something. Betty was the first step, and I was pretty sure she would also be the toughest.

I found her in the lounge, sitting at the piano, running her fingers aimlessly over the keys.

"Where's Eilene?" I asked.

"In her stateroom, I suppose."

I closed the door and sat down, waiting a moment in the hope that she would get it started. But she went on playing a simple, melancholy melody that she seemed to like.

I said, "I'd like to talk to you a minute, Betty."

She let the melody fade off into nothing and turned to look at me without saying anything.

"We'll all be under arrest pretty soon. We'll be asked to make statements. If they decide on a murder charge against one of us, we'll all be over here for months. Do you know that?"

"I suppose we will."

"What kind of statement are you going to make?"

"How do you mean? The truth, of course."

"What's the truth? And I'm not waxing philosophical."

"Then why ask?"

"Because I'd like to know what you think it is."

"That Dad knew one of them intended to kill him. That he told you so, and hired you to . . ."

"But he didn't."

"What?"

"I said he didn't."

"But the letter . . ."

"There isn't any letter."

She didn't say anything.

"Our friend Owen was threatening

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to lock me up. I just dreamed up the letter to cool him down."

"You're not a detective?"

"Yes, in California. I'm not licensed to play sleuth on the high seas."

She thought that over, and I could see that she didn't like what it added up to. With an air of faint disgust she said, "Do detectives post bonds? Big cash bonds?"

"Yeah," I said, "they do."

"And you'd forfeit it for operating outside California."

"Possibly."

"You're a wonderful example of fine citizenship, aren't you? You might lose a little money, so let's fix it, let's allow two corrupt, contemptible . . ."

"Listen, Betty, this is the story I'm going to tell: your father hired me sometime ago to find out if there was anything between his wife and Owen Madden. I found there wasn't, and we became friends. That's why I was on the trip—as a friend."

Betty stood up, staring at me with an expression compounded of contempt and fear. "And if you tell them that, and Eilene tells her story about the will, they—they might even—"

"Yes, they might. But I can get Eilene to forget that story—at least that she told you about it. But you'll have to forget what you think about Owen and her."

Slowly she crossed the room and sat down, not looking at me. "All this," she whispered, "lying, conniving, just to avoid being held up on an island for a while, just to hold onto a grubby way of making a living." She looked at me. "It's funny how wrong you can be about people."

I didn't say anything.

"Well, I won't do it. I know they were lovers. I've seen them together. I've seen her going down to the *Skylark* when Dad was out of town."

I came across the room and sat down beside her. "Okay, Betty, it's a mess then—for all of us. We'll all pay through the nose, but not one of us will ever pay the price they put on murder; there's too much evidence against the *three* of you, and not half enough against *one* of you."

She shook her head in puzzlement and disbelief, her eyes searching my face. "For the three of us," she whispered, "maybe lying is worth it. But for you it's cheap. I don't know. Is there a word for people like you, who can look at murder the way some people look at a traffic violation?"

"Cheap will do until you think of a better word. The quarantine launch will be alongside any minute. Are you going to do it my way?"

"Sorry, no."

"Baby, you just haven't any choice. When I tell them I tailed those two and found there wasn't anything between them, your story's going to look like nothing but a fairy tale."

"I'll take my chance."

"Then I'd better take the ace out of my sleeve. That rifle was fired from the forward hatch, just two feet from where you sleep. Do you think they'll believe anyone else would go up *there* to do it?"

"How do you know where it was fired from?"

"The point is, I can establish that it was."

"You'd be lying, of course."

"No, Betty, I wouldn't be."

"You—you think I killed him. You've thought so all along. Is that why you're doing all this?"

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"We haven't got time for reasons. I've got Eilene and Owen to tackle yet."

She didn't seem to be listening. She stood up abruptly and said, "You—" and then decided to keep the idea to herself.

"No, Betty. I didn't kill him. Are you doing it my way?"

"How many years do you get for perjury?" she asked harshly.

"This isn't perjury. You'll be under arrest on suspicion of murder. Suspects have a right to say as little or as much as they think wise. If this case goes to the grand jury—and you're lucky enough to be just a witness—then tell the truth. I intend to. But until then you're going to make a statement that doesn't implicate anyone, just as the rest of us will."

"What do I say?"

"Anything you like—as long as it isn't about Eilene and Owen."

"I'll tell you something very funny. I'm not doing it because you've frightened me. I'm doing it because I've still got the silly, schoolgirl idea that you're a nice guy, that you've got some decent reason for all this."

It took just ten minutes with Eilene to get her to see things my way, and with Owen it was less than five. I'm not sure if it was because he was tractable, or because the quarantine launch was coming up on our starboard bow.

The special-representative-in-charge was a blond, pink-faced man named Holman. He wore a pleasant smile, a wrinkled seersucker suit, and a one-inch haircut. He was painfully polite, and when he spoke he chose each word as if he'd just coined it himself.

His office was not in the regular government building, but on the second floor of an ordinary office building not far from the harbor. Otherwise it was typical of every civil servant's room from here to Nome. One plain desk, some wooden chairs, a bookcase, mud-brown linoleum, and a secretary who didn't get her job through nature's bounty, but from her place on a list.

We sat in a half circle in front of Holman's desk and waited for him to get past the polite inconsequentials and down to the business at hand. The *Skylark* had been impounded and its four passengers were presumably under arrest, although the ugly word had not yet been so much as whispered.

A Kona wind was blowing, and when Holman finished telling us what it was and apologizing for it he cleared his throat and said, in a new tone, "The quarantine officer advised me that one of you, acting as captain, reported this . . . murder aboard. Where was the ship when the crime occurred?"

Owen glanced briefly at me before he answered. "Eleven and a half days out of Wilmington. Last Sunday."

"Is the *Skylark* of American registry, Mr. Madden?"

"Yes. I told the quarantine officer all this."

"I know. Well, there's no question about jurisdiction, which means statements are in order. If you like, we can do it right here, together, or privately, if you prefer."

Nobody said anything.

"What will it be?"

Silence.

"Well, if there's no objection then, we'll do it now. You were acting as captain, Mr. Madden?"

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Owen nodded.

"Then I'd like to begin with you, please."

I glanced at the secretary. Her freshly sharpened pencil was poised over the pad like a spear-fisher waiting for the kill. It shot down swiftly and began to move when Holman asked his first question, "What was your relation to the deceased, Mr. Madden?"

The whole thing took less than forty minutes, everyone answering questions readily and at length, but pointing no fingers, dropping no innuendos along the way.

When it was over, Holman sat staring out his window while his secretary went over her notes.

Holman asked of nobody in particular, "You say it was a fishing harness. He was strapped in?"

"That's right," I answered.

"And what side of the anchor was the rifle on? Between the anchor and the fishing seat?"

Owen answered that one. "No, the other side of the anchor."

"Anchor lie flat on the deck?"

"Yes."

Holman went back to his window, his eyes as clouded as the sky the day the squall hit us. Finally he turned back, looked at the four of us with a kind of well-mannered skepticism, and said, "If I'd known it was going to be like this, I wouldn't have wasted our time. We'll have to take individual statements, of course. Maybe some of you will feel free then to say what's really on your minds. Frankly, I had supposed you all knew exactly what had happened, that it was an accident, or at most unpremeditated. I hope you all realize I'm forced to have a complaint filed in the District Court against all four of you—suspicion of murder—and to insist on prohibitive bail."

He picked up his phone, and two hours later I was making myself at home in one of the local houses of detention. I didn't know where the others had been taken, but each of us had gone his own way.

I was a government guest for just eight days, and I was visited by young Mr. Holman three times. Maybe I should say I was visited by young Mr. Holman twice and by old Mr. Holman once, because by the time that third visit rolled around he was an old and tired and harassed man, with blue circles under both eyes and a bad twitch in one of them.

It came on the eighth day, that third visit, and he walked in with his shoulders hunched and his mouth pulled into a thin, dyspeptic line. He threw his brief case onto my cot and fumbled out a cigarette. He said, "You're going to have to change your story. I'm afraid I never did believe it. A man just doesn't get friendly with a private detective he hires to tail his wife. But your story doesn't check out anyway."

"There's no way you could have checked my story and I know it."

"Is that so? Do you get paid to work, Bailey?"

"Not enough, but I get paid."

"We had Callister's bank account in Los Angeles gone over. No checks drawn to you, or to anyone else we could account for. Yet you're supposed to have worked for him for six weeks."

"Don't I detect a slight contradiction in your logic? You say a man doesn't get friendly, et cetera. Then

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you say he didn't hire me anyway. Which is it?"

Holman didn't answer that right off, but I could see that he was working on it.

"Look," I went on, "people don't pay for my kind of work with checks. They pay cash. Callister paid cash."

I said it simply, like a man pricking a large balloon with a very small pin. And Holman's face showed me I had touched the business end of the balloon.

After a while he said, "So I can't persuade you to change your story?"

"Sorry, I can't do it."

"What if I tell you I intend to charge you with murder and have the bunch of you before the grand jury?"

"I'd say you were making a big mistake."

He looked down at me, his left eye twitching a bit. He sat down and offered me a cigarette. I took it, lit it, and we sat some more in a kind of one-sided silence.

"You're right, of course," he said hoarsely. "The boys in the U.S. Attorney's office laughed in my face when I suggested we ask for an indictment against one of you. They wanted to know whose hat I was planning to pull the name out of."

"That's tough. Does this thing make a difference in your job—how you stand?"

"Why?"

"Call it curiosity."

"No effect whatever," he said emphatically. "I'm not a local politician, you know."

He went on mulling it over in gloomy silence, finally coming up with, "The girl inherits most of the dough, but everything indicates she didn't even know it. The wife comes into a good hunk of cash under the community property laws of California, but she'd have done as well if she'd just divorced the guy. You and Madden I can't figure any angle for at all, unless one of you had a yen for the wife. Any ideas on that?"

"After eight days in pokey? Sure."

"To hell with you, too."

And after a little more of the same he stood up and said, "Well, that's that. You can go any time. The others will be released in an hour or two."

He walked over, opened the barred gate, and said, "You'll be looking for a room. I'd recommend the St. James, considering the short notice." He walked away, leaving the cell door open.

I sat there looking at it and not wanting to get up and go out. It was far more pleasant just sitting back watching the gate swing slowly against its hinges, savoring the idea that I could walk out of there any time I wanted.

That evening I checked in at the St. James, a strictly marginal hostelry with a baroque exterior and a Grand Rapids-modern décor. They had a room all right, 506, with bath and a view of the beach. And as I went up in the grille-work elevator, I wondered if 506 didn't also have a full complement of peep-holes and midget microphones.

It was a pleasant enough room, high-ceilinged, with busy wallpaper and a balcony. I wondered if Holman had recommended the St. James to the others. I walked over and picked up the phone.

"This is Bailey in 506. If any reporters come asking about me, I'm not registered. I flew back to California."

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"Reporters. Yes, sir."

"Has a Betty Callister registered yet?"

"No, sir," he said, without having to give it a second thought. "Eilene Callister is in 304."

"Thanks. If Miss Callister registers, will you ask her to call me?"

"Yes, sir."

I hung up and wondered if there was any point in calling the Widow Callister. I decided there wasn't and went out to find something to eat. I found it in a restaurant that claimed to be "The Most Magnificent Chinese Food Place in the World." And it probably was, if you didn't get lost in one of the yawning caves or waterlogged rock gardens.

The desk clerk handed me a note along with my key when I got back. The note said Miss Betty Callister had asked for me at 9:30.

"Did she register here?"

"Yes, Room 414, but . . ." He turned to glance at the key rack. "She's out right now, with Mrs. Callister."

"Did Owen Madden check in?"

He shook his head. He hadn't had to check his register for that one either.

I went upstairs and got under the shower, wondering if Owen had enough money on him to find a bed somewhere. I doubted it. The *Skylark* would be out of police hands by now, but I also doubted if Owen would sleep there.

I was still wondering about it when I went to bed.

I woke up feeling thirsty and hungover and not in a mood for breakfast or for any of the other activities I had planned for the day. I got dressed and went out onto the balcony to wait for the phone to ring.

It came through at ten o'clock—Owen Madden calling from the lobby. I told him to come up.

His clothes were wrinkled and he had a blue stubble of beard on his face and a look of hostile contempt around his mouth, as if there was something a little indecent about people who slept in beds.

"Mind if I take a shower and borrow your shave kit?"

"Go ahead. Where'd you sleep last night?"

"Under a Koa tree, and how did *you* sleep?"

He disappeared into the bathroom without waiting for an answer, and half an hour later he was out again looking cleaner but no happier.

"I don't suppose you'd like to tell me what this is all about, would you?" he asked. "You were sort of putting your neck out a long way for people you don't give a damn about. Why? Did you kill the Old Man?"

"No."

"Frankly, I didn't think you did."

"I thought you had that all figured out."

"I'm afraid I have. Well, so long, Bailey, it's been weird knowing you." He walked toward the door.

"Going anywhere in particular?"

"Over to the Big Island. I can get a job on a boat—"

He broke off as a knock sounded daintily at the door. I called out a come-in, the door opened, and Eilene started in with a kind of half smile on her face. She stopped abruptly when she saw Owen, and the smile broke like a piece of china.

"I—I'll come back some—"

"I was just leaving," Owen said, and he shook my hand and walked out the door, striding past Eilene as if she had-

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n't been there, and closing the door firmly behind him.

"He's going over to Hawaii Island to get a job," I offered.

"How nice for him. I came up to thank you for—for everything. I'd have come sooner, but the reporters have been at me since dawn."

"Do they know I'm here?"

"No, they think you flew back."

There was a moment of awkward silence.

"Is there anything I can do?" she asked.

"Nothing, thanks. What are your plans?"

"I'm going home. I've got space on today's plane."

"Where's the *Skylark*?"

"Why?"

"I've got some stuff on it."

"Oh. It's at the Oahu Yacht Anchorage. Betty and I decided to put her up for sale."

"Why not?"

"Yes, why not. Well, goodbuy. I'll never know why, but you've been a good friend."

"Have I?"

"I think so. And I'll never forget it. Never."

I guided her gently toward the door and walked with her down the corridor to the elevator. While we waited for it to wheeze up to the fifth floor, I said, "Who do you think killed him, Eilene?"

"Does it matter?"

"Don't you think it does?"

"It was Owen, of course," she said quietly. "I wouldn't have cared if he'd had the honesty and manhood to face me with it." She looked at me wide-eyed. "I'd have married him, knowing he'd killed to . . . Well, what's the difference? It's as dead as poor Glen now. Deader."

The elevator got there, and Eilene shook my hand vaguely and stepped in. Her eyes stayed on mine until the cage dropped below the floor level.

I walked down the stairs to Betty's room on the fourth floor. There were no reporters, but there was also no response to my knock. I went back up and tried her by phone. No answer, and the desk clerk had no idea where she might be.

So I went on down to the Oahu Yacht Anchorage and found the *Skylark*, which was a little like coming home.

It seemed infinitely quiet down in the lounge, and musty. And there also seemed something missing. As I stepped into the galley, it came to me: Owen's guitar. It wasn't lying there on the couch as it always had.

I had left Callister's letter under the paper in the galley cupboard; now I took it out and dropped it in a pocket.

I opened Betty's door. Even the lace spread was gone. I went back to the master's cabin.

The gun was there, the government's identification tag still dangling from the trigger guard, the silencer gone. Possession of a silencer is against the law. I started opening drawers. Callister's clothes were still there, and his pipes.

And in the bottom drawer I found what I was looking for: a ball of twine, the same one I had noticed vaguely the first day Owen had shown me through the boat.

I picked it up and held it to my nose. It didn't have quite the odor I'd expected, but what it had spelled the same thing.

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For the first time I was absolutely certain I was right, and my hands trembled as I dropped the string into a pocket, picked up the gun, tore off the tag, and took out a cartridge.

I pried out the lead, dumped the powder down the drain in the two-by-two head, and put the gutted cartridge into the firing chamber.

Up on deck I walked forward to where the anchor lay and knelt beside it, putting the barrel of the rifle across the anchor and lining it up carefully with the fishing seat. I stretched out on the deck and sighted along it, moving the butt till it rested snugly against the side.

That did it: a bullet out of that gun would pass a few inches above the high back of the seat.

My hands were beginning to sweat now. I brought out the ball of string and unwound about fifty or sixty feet, broke it off and put a tight loop twice around the anchor and once around the rifle stock. Keeping the string taut, I put a loop carefully around the trigger, then around the back of the trigger guard, bringing it toward me without slack and making my way, half crouched, toward the stern.

I straightened slowly when I felt the seat touch the back of my legs. I turned the seat and sat down. The business end of the rifle leered at me with deadly intent.

There was an extra three feet of string. I picked it up and laid it across my lap. Slowly, I fumbled a match out of a pocket, lit it, and held it against the loose end of the string.

My left arm, keeping just the slightest tension on the long stretch of string, was beginning to get numb. If the string dropped down from the trigger guard, I'd have to go through all this again. I wondered if Callister had had any trouble.

No, he'd doubtless rehearsed it to a fine art.

The first match went out, but with the second the string began to burn and I dropped the loose end off my knees onto the deck. It burned quickly, fuse-like, with a flameless orange glow.

I looked at the gun some fifty feet away. I should have had my back turned and my free right hand gripping the pole. But the pole was gone, and I wanted to watch.

There were only a few inches of string left to burn before it reached my left hand. Slowly, slowly, I pulled. And the gun fired. The trigger had been filed to take only the slightest pressure.

I dropped the string and watched it as it burned, the ash disappearing to a white dust in the quiet movement of the wind across the decks. The gun had held against the anchor, the barrel still pointed at my head.

So here was the final answer to all the questions but one: Had Callister hoped to hang Eilene and her lover?

For me that question had long since been answered, and the answer had made it impossible for me to let the world in on the little secret Glen Callister had thought he was taking with him.

The answer was No—because there was no other way to explain his insistence that only *one* had intended to kill him. The state would have had to prove *which* one, and he had known they would never be able to do it.

But the love affair that had killed him would itself be a long time dead.

He had known that, too.

I took his letter from my pocket and tore it to bits, dropping the pieces over

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the side. The string had burned nearly to the anchor now, and I walked forward and knelt beside it.

The string burned around the rifle stock and the rifle turned and slipped to the deck. The string fell loosely beside it and went on burning, the faint white ash wafting away, rising, and vanishing.

And in a moment there was nothing there but a rifle, lying as though it had been thrown from . . . The thought was suddenly broken as a soft voice said, "Now we both know."

I swung around to see Betty Callister looking at me from the boarding ladder. Only her head and shoulders showed above the deck and she was gazing at me with a gravely speculative air.

"How long have you been there?" I asked.

"Long enough to know that Dad . . . killed himself."

She came up the rest of the way and stepped over beside me. She looked down at the gun and her eyes seemed to darken and a muscle pulled along her jaw.

"How long have you known?" she whispered.

"Almost from the first day."

"Then it's no surprise to you that Owen and Eilene have gone their separate ways."

"No, it isn't."

"Do you like playing God?"

"No," I said. "But I'd have liked something else even less—knowing your father had died in vain."

She looked up at me, holding my eyes steadily with hers for a long while. I felt that it was somehow important not to look away. And, quite suddenly, her eyes misted and filled, and she turned away and looked out toward the open sea.

After a moment I said, "I found quite a spot last night, in case you're hungry. The Most Magnificent Chinese Food Place in the World."

She turned back to me and slowly smiled. "Sounds wonderful," she said. "Let's go."

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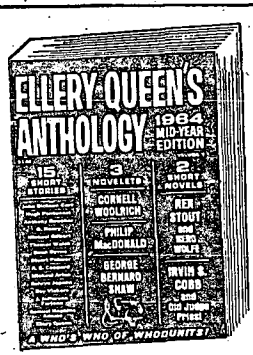

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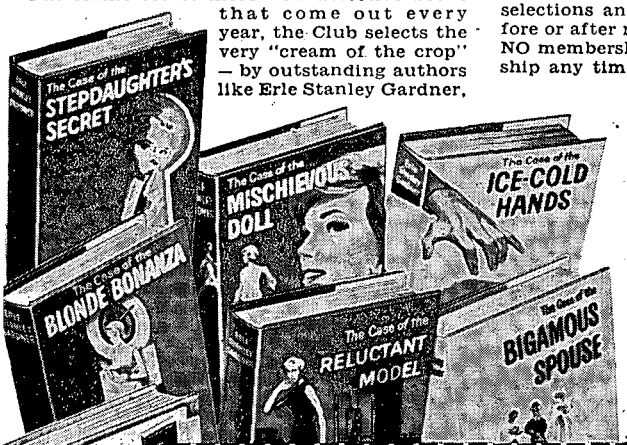
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